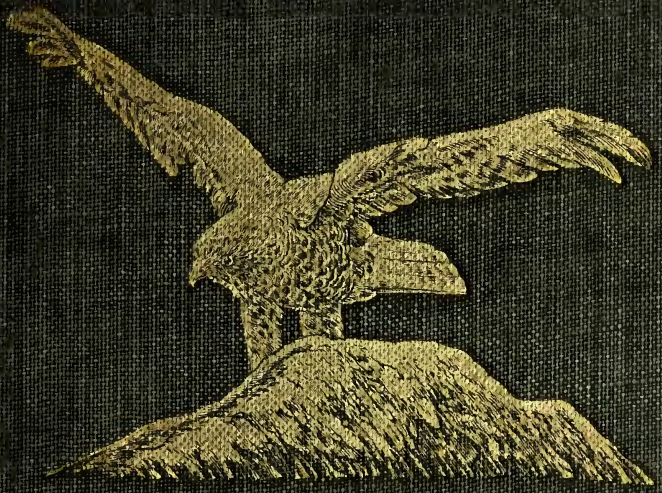
THROUGH BIRDLAND BYWAYS



OLIVER G. PIKE

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THROUGH BIRDLAND BYWAYS

B. Bowman

11 Bryan Road
Blackpool.

The Buzzard.

THROUGH BIRDLAND BYWAYS

WITH PEN AND CAMERA

BY

OLIVER G. PIKE, F.Z.S., F.R.P.S.

Member of the Institute of Lecturers

AUTHOR OF

THE "BIRDLAND" NATURE BOOKS, "WILD NATURE WOOED AND WON," ETC.

WITH 58 PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN DIRECT FROM WILD NATURE BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON

JARROLD & SONS, 10 & 11, WARWICK LANE, E.C.

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I DEDICATE this book to the Rev. D. Edmondes Owen, of Llanelwedd Rectory, and Mr. A. Gwynne-Vaughan, of Builth Wells, to show my appreciation of their successful efforts to protect from the ravages of the egg-collector, that beautiful and rare bird, the Kite, and other rare birds breeding in the Byways of Wild Wales. All true bird-lovers owe these two gentlemen a deep debt of gratitude, and if it had not been for their tireless efforts, the Kite would, ere this, have been numbered amongst our lost British birds.

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I

WHEN SPRING MEETS SUMMER

HE was sitting on the sunny bank below the hedge—a shivering ball of brown fluff. Such a small and altogether unimportant little creature he looked as he sat there blinking in the sunlight. For nearly six months, the Dormouse—that sprightly little squirrel of the hedgerows—had been rolled up in a tight ball, fast asleep in his small nest, and the first rays of real spring sunshine had called him forth from that profound slumber, which is all but death, to look once again on a bright world.

It really was spring; the Robin had greeted me with such a joyous song as I entered the old orchard that I knew it had come at last. A noisy little brown Wren, with tail cocked high in the air, also told me the happy news, and there, right up in the pale sky, a Lark heralded in the days of warmth and gladness with a song which had in it the whole promise of summer.

For many days the frosts and snow had lingered on, but now the spirit of Spring, awaking from her sleep, had conquered all, and the flowers joined the birds in welcoming the season all so much loved.

In the thick bushes above the Dormouse, a pair of Thrushes were making their home, and while the hen turned round and round inside it, making the mud-smeared interior smooth and cup-shaped, by pressing her breast against it, her mate sang in the tree above, and whistled out note after

THE SEDGE-WARBLER SETTLED DOWN UPON THE NEST.

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note for the very joy of living. And the little hedgerow squirrel, as the Dormouse might very appropriately be christened, awakened still more by the higher sun, caught up the spirit of the Thrush's song, ran nimbly up a swaying twig, and performed a wonderful series of little acrobatic feats.

So I left them: Thrush and Dormouse, Robin and Wren all joining in the song and glory of spring's great triumph, and I wandered down to a little patch of green on a sloping bank, which I visit each spring, for it is there that I always find the first violets. As I climbed over the old fence their perfume met me, and there peeping out from amongst the grass blades were those sweet wild flowers that I love so well. The violet speaks to me of spring; it always has a new story to tell me, and it seemed as if a little patch of heaven's blue, had just dropped down to make a tiny corner of God's beautiful earth more

beautiful. I listened to the song the Sky-lark sang; and then I looked down again at the tiny flowers, and drank in the story that both could not help telling. I did not like to pluck them, for it was not only a nature story they inspired, for sweet, tender, human memories linger around them, memories that to me are sacred, for I, and the flowers alone, remember. Yes, they looked like a tiny corner of the real April sky, as they nestled so silent and still, down there in the taller sheltering grass.

And leaving them also, I wandered down to the slowly flowing stream, and there again I saw the spirit of Spring. Down there, close to the water's edge, a Moorhen had made her nest, and that little Beaver of our English streams—the Water-Vole—was sitting below a bush, cleaning his long whiskers with his front feet, and thoroughly enjoying the warmth. In the dense thicket on the margin of the wood

YOUNG KESTRELS WATCHING AND WAITING FOR MOTHER.

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I heard one note that rang out loud and clear above the notes of other birds, and I knew that three weeks hence, under that bush, I should find the Nightingale's nest. And later on, after the sun had gone down, and the bright moon was seen between the floating clouds, his pure wild notes could be heard. Up there in that silent coppice, the small brown bird was giving out a loud, joyous song, as he called to the mate he wanted to win. A beautiful wooing this is too; a mate won by rapturous passionate song, sung when all the world is still, and Nature is asleep, and often the brown bird is the only listener, and a few weeks hence when she sits on the four eggs in the nest made of dead leaves, he is above her, sending out upon the silent night a message of glorious melody.

Each rising and setting of the sun brings spring nearer summer. Out in the orchard the air is bright with a

merry hum. Thousands of those busy little winged people—the Honey-bees—are flying to and from the blossom, carrying away with them a tiny drop of condensed sunshine, a food so sweet that all creatures like it. I like to hear the music of the bees' wings; an orchard without it has a great charm missing. It is like a woodland corner without the Warbler's song, or like a green meadow without a daisy.

One morning while strolling down the hedgerow where the Dormouse, Thrush, and Wren had greeted the first days of spring, I parted the thick leaves and looked into the Thrush's nest. Four open beaks greeted me, and then the young birds, seeing that it was a stranger, shuffled out of the nest, and scrambled through the branches.

What a bright, gay morning this is; the happiest day of a happy spring! Every bush seems to contain a singer;

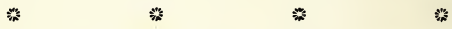
The Sedge-Warbler.

there is music in the sky, in the air around me, and in every tree. Flowers cover the ground and the morning is sweet with their perfume. The Thrush returns with a beakful of food, but seeing me hurriedly flies on, and looking up I see some pale pink petals. It is summer's first rose, high up on the hedge. The dancing sun circles coming down through the branches above see it too, and one sunbeam of spring just finds its way through a maze of moveing leaves, and gently kisses the rose of summer.

And so the seasons meet.

I lingered on in this little world of music, colour, and song, listening to the story that each flower, bird, or insect told me. All were happy, there was not a sad note anywhere, and it was not until the Brown Owl hooted from his haunt in the wood that I knew that evening had come. Even then the birds were not

silent, and the big red sun went down on a joyous world.



It was into this world—the great, free, and wonderful land of the birds—that I went out again with my pen and camera to compile this book, and I want my readers to learn to love Birdland as I love it, and to try to realise that there is more real joy in the sport of the camera; more true happiness in a small bird's song, or a butterfly's flight; in fact, more genuine pleasure in LIFE, than there ever can be in that sport of the gun, that only brings Death in its train.

MALLARDS, TUFTED DUCKS, AND POCHARDS.

(A Birdland byway, where the Collector is unknown.)

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II

THE BUZZARD AND HIS HOME

IF my readers imagine that the lot of the serious bird photographer is an easy one, let them read the following account of my attempts to photograph one of our shyest birds of prey.

It was about four years ago that I first attempted to photograph this rare bird at its nest. I was well hidden underneath a small tent, but it was a bitterly cold day, and a strong wind blowing, made it very uncomfortable work. I remained there as long as I could, and then numbed with the cold I crept out, and immediately afterwards the Buzzard returned, but seeing me, of

course flew onwards very startled! This was exceedingly hard fortune, as if I had remained in my cold place of hiding a moment longer I should have secured the photograph that I had waited so long for.

Another attempt was last spring. I found a nest in a good position and then placed my small green bird-tent on the opposite side of the dingle. It was not a particularly good place to fasten the tent, and as it was, we had to hew a seat for the photographer out of the rock, and build a stand for the camera, as it was not possible to fix up even a small tripod. Underneath the tent I remained for three full days, and during the whole of that time the Buzzard remained at the nest for less than one minute! The eyrie contained one energetic youngster, and each morning, before photography was possible, one of the birds brought a rabbit, rat, or mole

to the nest and left it there for the youngster to feed upon. I secured a good series of animated pictures of this young Buzzard pulling its prey to pieces, and on more than one occasion it nearly toppled out of the nest. It placed its two feet upon the carcase, and then with its beak, pulled and tugged as hard as it possibly could. During this performance its wings were raised and lowered, and as sometimes happened, the piece of flesh it was pulling at suddenly broke off, and the downy little creature toppled over backwards and almost fell overboard. I was in a most uncomfortable position, crouched up as I was under my tent, and must confess I was keenly disappointed at the result. Although it was quite impossible for the old Buzzard to see me, I think this bird must be gifted with a very strong sense of smell. When she first came to the nest she was quite unconcerned, but then became suspicious,

looked hard at my almost hidden tent, lifted her head, and suddenly flew off. Now I have discovered a way to overcome this difficulty, and intend to make more attempts to photograph this magnificent bird at its nest, during the coming spring (1910).

The year before last, while on the Welsh hills, I discovered a Buzzard's nest containing young. This was at the top of an oak-tree, and the latter was on the side of a steep hill. By going a short distance up the hill I could get on a level with the nest, although I was rather too far away for successful photography. However, I placed my tent in a suitable position, covered it over with branches, and left it there for about twelve hours. The next morning I started work inside early, and remained there until seven o'clock in the evening. I secured a short set of living pictures of the hen Buzzard feeding her hungry youngsters. She had

a small rabbit in the nest, and for an hour she pulled pieces from this and gave them to the babies. If she happened to pull off a large or hard piece of flesh, she swallowed it herself, but all the smaller pieces were distributed fairly equally between her young. Although I am perfectly certain this Buzzard could not see me, yet she became very suspicious of something, and kept looking in my direction, and then hurriedly left. Just eight hours later, she returned with a small mouse in her beak, dropped this in the nest, and went away. When it was too dark for photography, I returned to the small inn where I was staying.

The good landlady, who on many occasions has made me so comfortable in this miniature hotel, hidden down in a magnificent and wild valley, was very much alarmed at my long absence. She expected me back to mid-day lunch, and when at seven o'clock in the evening I

had not put in an appearance, she was actually preparing to send out a search party, as she was convinced that I had fallen over one of the treacherous cliffs. I shall never forget her expression of delight when I walked into the large, stone-paved kitchen and called for a big drink, for I was hungry and thirsty, having forgotten to take any provisions with me. "Well, well, indeed!" she exclaimed, with her hands raised, "I thought you were dead!" "No," I replied; "I'm very much alive, and hungry, too!" Very soon a sumptuous meal was prepared, and I did full justice to it.

For some time I have had the idea that it would be possible to photograph the Buzzard in the winter months, and last January I purposely kept one week quite free from lecture work, and with two friends went to a wild and unfrequented spot in the heart of Buzzard

A YOUNG BUZZARD WHICH HAD KILLED ITS COMPANION.

A BEAUTIFULLY MARKED CLUTCH OF BUZZARD'S EGGS.

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land. When we started we little thought what a rough time we were going to have. Our idea was to attract the birds down, by placing bait for them, and build a hiding-place of rock close by.

We arrived at our station Saturday night. The village was pitch dark and it was raining heavily. After a short search we discovered the chief inn in the place, and there chartered a carriage and a pair of good horses to take us the ten miles to the small inn which we intended to make our headquarters. It was a novel ride. The rain ceased somewhat, but we could barely see beyond our horses' heads as they dashed along. About ten o'clock we drove up at a rather primitive inn, certainly the strangest place under this name that we had ever stayed at; but when your work takes you into the wildest spots of our British Isles, you learn to appreciate even a place like this.

It rained the whole of the following day, and such furious rain it was that we decided to remain indoors all the day, with the consolation that this storm would surely pass by the morrow.

Monday arrived, and it was, as we hoped, a bright, fine day. The place we had decided upon was five miles farther on, quite outside the small village, and right away in the very heart of the mountains. The whole of that day we were employed in building a stone shelter in which to hide ourselves and our cameras, but when the sun had set we found our work only half done. On our way home we passed a farmhouse, and were able to obtain a good tea, which we heartily enjoyed. Just after leaving this place, we suddenly encountered one of the most fearful hailstorms that three hardened travellers in these islands had experienced. Although we were to a certain extent protected with mackintoshes, in less than

a minute, two of us were soaked to the skin. It was impossible to face the storm; we just had to crouch down with our backs to the large hailstones, and before the storm-cloud had passed over us, we were three most miserable objects.

As my friend Paton had to hurry home on the following morning, there were only two of us to complete our small hut on the top of the hill; but by four o'clock in the afternoon we had the satisfaction of seeing our work completed, and a very natural hiding-place it looked. It just wanted a good fall of snow to almost completely make it harmonise with the surroundings. To our delight, before we reached the foot of the mountain, snow began to fall, and half an hour later a real Welsh blizzard was in progress. Our cameras, being too heavy to carry, had been brought over that afternoon in a trap, and we arranged to return in the same conveyance.

That five-mile drive was a memorable one. For four miles we travelled straight in the teeth of this great storm. Fortunately it was not freezing, and most of the snow melted as it settled, but a colder wave came quickly upon us, and by the time we reached our inn we resembled travellers from the arctic regions. Icicles were hanging from my hat, and my Burberry coat was covered with a quarter of an inch of solid ice. Our hands and faces had patches of ice on them, and we were almost frozen ourselves. We experienced for the first time what a real mountain blizzard is like, and I certainly am not anxious to go through another experience like it.

The next morning we turned out at six o'clock. The snow had ceased and partially melted, although the mountains were still white. When we began our walk of five miles through the valley, some of the stars were still shining over-

head, but slowly these gave way to a brighter sky, and the dark outlined hills put on more real shapes. Never have I seen the old hills of Wales look finer. I have seen them in the spring clothed in a new and ever brightening green, with some of their great slopes covered in bluebells; I have been amongst them in the hot days of August, when the fresh green of spring has changed to the duller garb of summer; I have looked upon these giants that guard the valleys, when purple heather has told me that this is just a burst of glory before the cold and death of winter. Yesterday, the mountain-tops were dead, their bright colours had gone, and the beauty of the other seasons had perished. But this cold winter morning they were magnificent in their white glory. They were clothed in a new dress of virgin whiteness, and then the early sun lit up the summits, and threw long shadows right across the valley. A

Woodlark above the road, perched on a hummock on the hillside, was singing loudly; a Robin in the centre of our path looked surprised at the early wanderers; high up over the river a Raven was going out on a food-hunting expedition, and two Buzzards were "climbing the air" above the hill. But what was more interesting to us, three Kites were circling round us, not more than eighty yards away. We waited some time watching these rare birds, and admired their glorious flight. Those who have not seen the Kite on the wing do not know what perfection in flight is. As we carried our cameras and kinematograph up the mountain to our hut, we had hopes and imaginary visions of one or more of this almost extinct British bird coming to our bait, a hope, too, that was realised, as I shall explain.

Our hut was reached, our bait, consisting of a dead sheep, was placed in position, our cameras were fixed up and focussed,

THE BUZZARD LOOKED AT THE BRIGHT LENS OF THE CAMERA.

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and then we closed up the entrance and waited.

After about two hours of this silent watching we both realised very vividly that bird photography on a Welsh mountain in the depth of winter was far different to the same work in the summer. A strong wind was blowing straight towards us, a favourable wind certainly, for it would blow our scent away from our bait, if a bird of prey did approach. But as a snow-cloud was coming up we expected that photography would not be possible. A few minutes later the snow commenced, slowly at first, but quickly increasing. We could hear a pair of Buzzards calling overhead, and expected them down, and a Raven had also discovered the carcase. The other side of the valley was almost hidden from our view, and quickly our hut became covered. We were almost frozen although so well sheltered, and when six hours had gone by we crept out, for we had

endured just about as much as it was possible for us to do. We left our cameras inside for the night, and then attempted the descent of the steep hillside, which in one place was almost a cliff. Six inches of snow covered the ground, and many times we slipped before finally reaching the valley. It was a heavy walk home, but just before sunset we arrived at our inn.

The next morning we were up again at six o'clock, and again saw our friend the Kite, and many Buzzards and Ravens. We reached our hut in good time, and found that a lot of water had accumulated inside, for a rapid thaw had set in. We quickly had our cameras fixed up, but found that they had swollen considerably in the night, and now we had the hardest piece of luck. I had just crawled inside, and was pulling a branch over the entrance, and while I did so, a Kite swooped down and settled on the sheep, with its

The Fulmar Petrel.

great wings raised over its back and its large forked tail spread. The bird saw the movement of the branch before I saw the bird, and of course instantly flew away. Neither of us had placed a plate in our cameras, but we both saw the image of the bird on our focussing screens, and I think that that really magnificent picture that we *might* have had will haunt us for the rest of our days. It was a picture of a lifetime, lost through a movement! It was one of the keenest disappointments that I have had in fourteen years of nature photography. We waited on and on, with the water still running into our hut; it was trickling down in a dozen streams through the roof, and at three o'clock in the afternoon we had almost had enough, but after a walk home, and a good meal of vegetables, for meat could not be procured in this remote village, we decided to try again on the morrow.

All that night it rained in torrents, but cleared about seven o'clock next morning. Again we walked the five miles, and again waited five hours in the hut, but the only visitor that put in an appearance was a Carrion Crow, although Buzzards, Ravens, and a Kite were near us; but all seemed suspicious, and so our three days' vigil ended, and we were hopelessly beaten. We had experienced a week of the very worst weather they had had on the hills for many months, and, in fact, the very week I had set aside for this work turned out to be the most desperate weather of the whole winter. On the last day, Saturday, the very clouds themselves came down, and so we packed up, drove ten miles to our station in a deluge of rain, and went to our respective homes.

In the early spring, about the second or third week in March, the Buzzard is often seen in small flocks. I have seen

six or eight together high above the hill-tops, and at such times they will soar up to a great height. But perhaps it is better still to watch a single pair soaring. They go in opposite directions. Each gives three flaps of its great wings, and then several circles are climbed, and by standing almost immediately underneath one obtains a beautiful view of this unique exercise.

In April the birds return to their breeding quarters and begin to think about repairing their old nests. The Buzzard usually builds two nests in the same dingle, and these are used in alternate seasons. The nests, especially those built in trees, often reach huge dimensions, for quantities of sticks are utilised. Sometimes the Raven will take possession of one of the nests, and then the Buzzard will go to another dingle or wood; but I have known on one occasion both birds to have a nest in the same

dingle, and within one hundred yards of one another; but this is the exception, for the Raven is a bold and jealous bird and does not like intruders. I have seen the male Raven, while his mate has been sitting on her eggs, dash into a flock of Jackdaws which flew past, and with his loud bark and dashing manners disperse the smaller birds, all of them with loud screams flying for their lives.

Buzzards seem to take a long time to finish their nests, and as soon as the first egg is laid they begin to carry a quantity of fresh green leaves into the nest. Why the birds do this I hardly know, unless it is to give a certain amount of dampness to the eggs. I have seen some nests with large quantities of leaves around the eggs. I think that these leaves may possibly be simply for decorative purposes, for I once saw a most remarkable Buzzard's eyrie. It was on a ledge of a cliff, in a place

where I could not have photographed it without a rope, and as I had not one with me I could not get a photographic record of this most interesting nest. It contained one young bird; the nest itself, and the whole of the ledge, about two feet in width and six feet long, was simply covered with a layer of white blossom from the mountain ash. Surely the birds must have placed these flowers there for decorative purposes, for I can think of no other purpose. The Kite is fond of decorating its nest with rags, and the brighter the colour of these, the better pleased the birds seem to be; and therefore I see no reason why the Buzzard should not follow suit. Whether leaves or flowers are used, the preference is always given to the mountain ash.

The second egg is laid about four days after the first, and so on with the third and fourth. But four eggs in Wales is the exception, and although I have seen

dozens of nests, I have never personally known more than three, and more often two. In Devonshire, where a few pairs of Buzzards are found, four eggs are often laid, and they are usually better marked than those laid by the Welsh birds. This, without doubt, is caused by the food supply. In certain parts of Wales food is not plentiful, and owing to this a remarkable thing happens. I mentioned that the eggs are laid at intervals of a few days; but the hen begins to sit as soon as the first is laid, and the result is that one young bird arrives on the scene some days in advance of its companions. In four days he grows rapidly, as most young birds do, and by the time the second young bird arrives he is much stronger, and when the food is brought to the nest he is able to overpower his brother. The plump little bird gains in strength daily and his brother becomes weaker. While

the parents are away they will spar at one another, and even have desperate fights, with the result that the weaker bird is actually killed. I have known the first two Buzzards which were hatched, to turn upon the third arrival a few days after it left its shell, and, after killing it, devour it! In fact, the youngster which is killed is usually eaten. I have mentioned this fact before, in a previous book, and one well-known egg collector, in reviewing this work, severely criticised my statement, and did not hesitate to call it a "fairly-tale." Now I know well, that this person's acquaintance with the Buzzard is limited to a few hurried week-end visits to its haunt, where he has arrived on Saturday night, swooped down upon the nests on Sunday, placed the eggs in his satchel, and hurried back to town by the night train! Such a person is not in a position to criticise, and should not attempt it.

During the past six years I have spent many months in the Buzzard's haunt, and I have made a special study of the bird, and I know that my statement is an absolute fact, and can prove it. I know a thoroughly reliable keeper who has watched the three young birds fighting, and he took me to this nest, but when I got there only two birds were in the nest, and the remains of the almost devoured third bird were still there, and I still have the foot and leg bones of this bird in my possession, which clearly shows that the young birds had torn the flesh away. My critic will probably say that young Buzzards of this age could not feed themselves. To this I can reply that for three days I have watched a Buzzard a fortnight old pull to pieces a rabbit, and I have a kinematograph record of this interesting feat. The fact remains that in many nests in the principality the young birds disappear,

WITH WINGS AND TAIL SPREAD, THE BUZZARD ALIGHTED ON A ROCK NEAR THE PHOTOGRAPHER.

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with the exception of one, and if the nests are examined, in nearly every case the observer will find unmistakable evidence that they have been eaten in the nest. It is simply the law of Nature. Where food is difficult to find the weaker must go to the wall, no matter whether it is mammal, bird, or insect, and there is absolutely no evidence to prove that my statement is a "fairy-tale." If my sceptical critic still doubts me, I shall be quite willing to bring forward still more convincing evidence. Many naturalists have been only too willing to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, and believe implicitly all their statements, which were in many cases not taken from Nature. I prefer to find out my own facts, and I pride myself that in all my writings my facts are taken direct from the mountains, the fields, or the woods, and I venture to think that they have far more evidence to

back them up than the feeble criticisms of a week-end naturalist.

The Buzzard is really one of the finest birds we have in these islands, and it is a pity that it is so rare. If it had not been for the efforts of a few landowners and bird-lovers in Wales, the bird would now have been as rare as the Kite. But, thanks to protection, it is holding its own. This great bird has chosen a fitting home for its last stronghold, a home that is made even more wild and romantic by the presence of the birds.

III

THE HOME OF THE FULMAR PETREL

I

ONE bright Sunday morning of June, 1908, I was sitting on the very summit of a high Hebridean hill. It was a satisfactory hill to climb. With the majority of hills, when you reach the top you find it a large plateau, but here, I was actually able to sit astride on the topmost rock, and below me and all around I looked upon a wonderful panorama. Towards the north stretched my wild little island, dotted with numberless lochs of weird and fantastic shapes, while winding through them, like a long yellow

thread, was the solitary road, that led from one end of the island to the other. Away to the east could be seen the hills of Scotland, blue in the summer haze; and we recognised many of them by the shape of their peaks. In the opposite direction, and beyond the shores of my island, there lay the great calm sea, so blue, and silent, and still, that one would hardly believe that in that vast shimmering surface, there was force and terror, as great and more powerful than any other force in the world. And here and there on its surface were smaller islands, not far from the shores of the larger island. Small boats were seen at anchor in the bay, and out at sea, a long stream of smoke hanging over the water told that a steamer was making its way southwards.

It was altogether a fascinating scene, but what interested me most was a grey dot, far out to the west, like a small

cloud, almost invisible on the sky-line of the sea. On looking at this through my field-glass, I recognised it as a group of islands, and this was my first glimpse of that little-known romantic isle—St. Kilda.

For many years I had been looking forward to seeing this famous group of islands, but when I travelled north on this occasion, I had not the slightest idea of visiting them, but from the moment that I looked upon St. Kilda's lonely isle, I had an irresistible longing to cross the sixty or seventy miles of water intervening and explore the place for myself. On making inquiries I found that a boat would shortly start for St. Kilda from Glasgow, and would touch at a pier about twenty-five miles from the place we were then staying at, and so a carriage and pair were hired, and we drove over the many rough miles.

I purchased a good stock of provi-

sions, enough to last me a fortnight, had these securely packed, and awaited my boat, and was soon on my way. It was eleven o'clock at night when our vessel steamed into the bay of St. Kilda. The island looked deserted. Although so late, it was quite light enough to distinguish the features of the island, and the seventeen low cottages could be easily seen standing in a long semicircle above the beach. The hooter of our steamer was sounded, but not a single person stirred himself, and so we anchored for the night, and looked forward to the morrow.

When I turned out the next morning I had many misgivings as to whether I should be able to land, and whether it would be possible to find lodgings on the island. It was ten a.m. before the natives launched a boat to come out to us, for they make it a rule to do no work of any kind on Sunday, and if it had not been for the mails on board I

THE FULMAR PETREL MAKES A NEST ON A NARROW LEDGE OF THE MOST PRECIPITOUS CLIFFS.

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do not believe they would have approached our vessel at all. As soon as they came alongside I inquired if it would be possible to stay on the island for a fortnight, and was at once informed that a room could be provided for me. But one and all refused to touch my luggage on the Sabbath, and it was not until the clock struck twelve midnight that they would bring it up to my room.

Few of my readers can be aware that in Great Britain there is a village containing seventy inhabitants, the majority of which have never seen a horse! They have never looked upon a tree or a bush, for such things do not grow upon their wild wind-swept home. They do not know what a modern street or an up-to-date building is like. They did not know that the South African war was in progress until seven months after hostilities had commenced! The natives live to a hearty old age, and yet from

the moment they are born, to the time when they depart from this world at the ripe age of eighty or more, it is not necessary for them to spend a single farthing! And stranger still, in this remarkable and happy village the tax-collector is absolutely unknown, and it is a spot where the women do the work, and the men are the gossips!

What a delightful place to live in! I can imagine some of my masculine readers exclaiming; but wait. Before you decide to go to St. Kilda, remember that sometimes, for nine months of the year, it is quite cut off from all communication with the outside world, and during that time you would have to live on the dried, salted flesh of sea-birds. Yet for interest and novelty it would be difficult to find another place of its kind, and it is hard to realise that such a remarkable and old-world community can be found within a three-days' journey from London.

The Raven.

The home of the Fulmar Petrel is such an interesting place, that I am sure my bird-loving readers will bear with me if I give a short account of the human inhabitants to be found there before proceeding to the birds themselves.

I mentioned that women are the chief workers, and all the heavy duties seem to be performed by them. They milk the cows twice a day, walking two miles out and back in the early morning and afternoon with their stools and pails. They carry down from the hills heavy loads of peat; they also dig and store the latter, packing it in small stone houses for their winter fire, and they attend to the rather primitive agriculture of the island. The men will sometimes help in the daily work, but more often they are seen standing in groups outside the cottages, discussing, with excited gestures, what they intend to do on the morrow, while others are seen sitting on

a rock, and with needle and thread mending holes in coats or darning socks. I verily believe that the women would have been ashamed to see their husbands doing the heavy work. It is a small, strange world, unlike anything else in these islands, and one seems to be in Topsy-turvy Land.

Both the women and the men go about with bare feet—except on Sundays—and all are magnificent climbers. I saw one woman digging peat, or rather turf, in a place where many men with good nerves would fear to follow. The men are absolutely fearless on the cliffs, and are the finest climbers to be seen in the world; and although for generations past they have obtained most of their food from the cliffs, a fatal accident through climbing is unknown.

On the Sabbath all the natives don their best clothes—a few of the men had remarkable clothes. I saw one in a

rather ancient cut of frock-coat and a captain's cast-off peak-cap, and it was really one of the funniest combinations of clothes I have ever seen. The women, on the other hand, look really picturesque in their red shawls, and it would have made a fine picture if I could have got a photograph of them coming to church. But it was really more than I dared do to even show my camera on Sunday! If I had done so, I should have been looked upon as a hopeless heathen, and further work on the island would have been impossible.

I had extreme difficulty in photographing the women. I really believe they thought my kinematograph was an infernal machine. The men crowded round me and looked with awe-struck countenances at the curious box, on which the operator turned a handle, and instead of music proceeding therefrom, a low continuous growl was heard! But

the women ran no risks, they simply fled, and peered at me through half-closed doors or windows!

I did induce one or two women to allow me to take their photographs, but only by bribing them to the extent of half a crown a sitting. One old lady whom I managed to photograph at her spinning wheel, would only consent to the operation if I did it behind her cottage where no one could see her. I wanted to get the picture showing her sitting at her cottage door, but this she would not allow. I got everything ready, and then she came out, and the whole performance was over in about thirty seconds, and I paid the fee. Two hours later there was a feeble tap, tap, tap at my door, and a blushing girl entered with a two-shilling piece in the palm of her hand. "Mother says too much money," she blurted out in broken English, "too much money for picture." I really believe that the old spinning

woman was struck with many qualms of conscience at having earned so considerable a sum in so short a time!

On another occasion I endeavoured to take some animated pictures of the women milking. I thought the best plan would be to go to the place where they milked the cows, known as the Glen, and wait for the women to arrive. But four o'clock, the usual time for milking, came and went, and still no women appeared, and at last I departed, but discovered on my way back that the women had been sitting and waiting on the hill above until I departed. So I interviewed one with the aid of an interpreter, for they all spoke Gaelic, and she said that it was their intention to wait until it was too dark for me to take pictures, and then they would go down to milk. I had to go away without my photographs. But, strange to say, the very woman to whom we had been speaking,

while going down the steep hillside to milk her cow, slipped, and sprained her ankle rather badly. Of course this was all put down to the camera, and it seemed as if I was likely to get into some trouble, but the next morning I sent a message to her to explain that this accident was a punishment upon her, for not allowing me to take the photographs! After that I found it was easier to perform my photographic work.

The men, during the summer months, occasionally have bursts of energy, and suddenly decide to go on a fishing expedition. The lines are set by day, and when evening comes on they go to the shelter of a cave, and remain there until the early morning. On their return and before landing they have a service of thanksgiving on board, and this was one of the most genuine and impressive services I have ever seen. The oldest member of the crew kneels in the bows

A GROUP OF PUFFINS—THE CLOWNS OF BIRDLAND.

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of the boat, and he chants in a weird tone many psalms or prayers, while the others, all devoutly kneeling in the rocking boat, join in. They go through a similar service in the evening after setting their lines, and although I could not understand a word of what was said, I could see that all were thoroughly in earnest.

IV

THE HOME OF THE FULMAR PETREL (*continued*)

II

THE chief food of the natives of the island of St. Kilda consists of sea-birds—the Fulmar Petrel and Puffin—and these are captured in a clever manner. A small horsehair noose is placed at the end of a long bamboo rod, and the intrepid climber goes down the cliffs on a rope, and then, letting go of this, he slowly stalks along the narrow ledges towards an unsuspecting Puffin. If the latter should become restless, the climber stops and talks to it in bird language, that is, he almost exactly reproduces the Puffin's

usual notes, and this usually has the effect of quieting it. As soon as he gets within range, he slowly pushes the rod towards the bird, deftly slips the noose over its head, and with a turn of the wrist pulls it tight, and the prey is captured. For excitement this sport must equal any, for it combines, as it were, fishing, stalking, and climbing.

St. Kilda and its adjacent islands certainly contain one of the most marvellous bird sights it would be possible to find in this world. There is nothing that I know of to equal this spectacle. Myriads of Puffins and Fulmar Petrels haunt the steep cliffs.

The latter bird forms the staple food supply of the islanders, and in the month of August, every man and woman makes tracks for the cliffs, and the men, descending the steepest parts with the aid of ropes, collect the birds, and the women carry large bundles of them down to the

village, where the children help in plucking them. Then the birds are cleaned and salted and packed away for winter use, and I believe about three hundred are allotted to each man, woman, and child.

The Fulmar Petrel chooses the most precipitous places for its nest, and on the giant cliffs of St. Kilda the birds have an ideal home. They have attempted to breed on the cliffs of one of the Orkney Islands, and when there three years ago, I saw several pairs, and if the egg collectors will only let them alone, a good colony should be established.

Soon after I landed on the island of St. Kilda, I made arrangements with one of the natives to take me to a spot where it would be possible to photograph the bird. He chose a cliff about five hundred feet high, a great wild jagged boulder, the lower portion washed bare, but above this some wild, wind-swept

grass was growing, and it was amongst this that some of the Fulmars had their home. It was not easy to get near them, for most of the nests contained young. The Fulmar is a curious bird in this respect, for when it is sitting on its egg it will almost allow you to touch it before leaving, but as soon as the young one leaves the shell, the sitting bird will fly away before you get anywhere within photographic range. However, we did discover one nest with one egg, but it was in a desperate place. I must confess that I envied the way my guide ran about the narrow ledges, or climbed up almost impossible places, but I was determined that where he went I would follow, and I did, but often I had to get him to help me over some difficult piece of rock. The nest was on a small ledge on a smooth, sloping piece of rock, which led down to a steep precipice. About three feet below the nest was a long crack in the

rock, just large enough to support one's foot, and by creeping along this I was able to hold my camera in front of me, and I secured several pictures. It is really exciting work, stalking on a cliff like this. Luckily we were sheltered from the wind, otherwise it would have been difficult to keep my balance, for both hands were occupied in manipulating the camera. The egg in the nest was chipping, and the sitting Fulmar seemed rather shy and more than once left the nest, circled round and round, and then returned and sat on the edge of the nest, then slowly shuffled towards her egg. It was exceedingly interesting to watch the manner in which she covered her egg. First she stood over it, and almost seemed to stand on "tip-toe," if you can imagine a bird doing such a thing, and then with her beak, she pushed the egg underneath her, and when it seemed fixed in a comfortable position she settled down. Under-

neath its body the Fulmar has a small hollow space, bare of feathers, and the egg is fixed in this. Sometimes the egg fits so securely that the sitting bird if suddenly alarmed will actually carry her egg for a short distance when leaving her nest, and I saw two birds do this. One of these was about twenty feet above me. I was at the moment in a rather perilous position and my guide was helping me to get round a treacherous corner. The bird above me left her nest, and carried her egg for about a yard; then this dropped, struck a rock close to my face, and exploded with a loud noise. The egg was unfertile, and probably had been sat upon for a good many weeks. Anyway it was filled with the most evil-smelling liquid I have ever known, and my face and hands were covered with this! I shall never forget that experience: the smell was too truly awful for description!

The Fulmar Petrel has the power of

ejecting from its beak a very pungent oil. The natives extract this oil and burn it in their very primitive lamps. I once mentioned this to a man who kept a motor-car, and when he afterwards saw the name of the bird in print, he suggested to me that I had spelt the word Petrel incorrectly!

This oil has a very peculiar smell, and quite unlike anything else I know, and to me it was really most unpleasant. The village of St. Kilda seems to be impregnated with this smell, for you notice it everywhere, inside and outside the cottages. As we climbed about the cliffs the young birds had several successful shots at us. The first charge usually carries about a yard, and the following charges fall far short. However, one energetic youngster, which is pictured in this chapter, so far succeeded that it smothered the bellows of my camera, and again placed a few beakfuls

THE YOUNG FULMAR IS A PRETTY, FLUFFY LITTLE CREATURE.
(In the background is a Fulmar's egg.)

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upon my clothes and boots. The result was that never again was I able to use those clothes in civilised parts! After my photographic work was finished, I rested for over an hour on the side of the cliff. The sea below me was perfectly smooth, but the rocky cliffs were wild in the extreme. Down below they were black and bare, for the violent winter storms had cleared away all forms of vegetation for over two hundred feet above the sea-level. Above this there was plenty of long grass, sea-pinks, daisies, red-sorrel, and campion. Every little rock had a crowd of Puffins upon it, and a vast host of these birds were flying past.

When, a few years ago, I first saw the large flocks of Puffins on the Farne Islands, and again later, visited Ailsa Craig and looked upon the large army of these birds there, I thought I had seen some of the largest flocks of Puffins that it would be

possible to find. But the number of both these put together is insignificant when compared with the myriads of black and white birds which passed me during that hour's wait on the cliff. They went past in one gigantic unending procession; down on the sea there were a hundred thousand more, and the passing and repassing of a million rapidly vibrating wings added a weird sound to a scene that few pens could describe. It was one of those marvellous scenes from behind Birdland's veil that could not be described, and certainly would never be forgotten. There were Puffins in the air, on the water, and on the land, and even inside the land, for as we walked down to our boat, hundreds scuttled out of their burrows at our feet, settled on the rocks, and gazed at the strange intruders with an altogether comical expression on their funny faces. On one occasion when attempting to photograph

Richardson's Skua.

Puffins I simply had to stop my work and burst out laughing, for their clownish look would have almost raised humour out of a stone!

For quite nine months of the year, from August to May, the little world of St. Kilda is isolated, with the exception of an occasional trawler which may call in. During these lonely months, if the natives wish to send messages to their friends, they are sent by the most unique mail-boat in the whole world. A letter fully addressed is enclosed in a tin, and this is securely fastened in a piece of wood which has been hewn to the shape of a boat. This is covered with tar to make it waterproof, it is attached to a large bladder, and the whole is thrown out on the sea when a north-west wind is blowing. Thus left to the mercy of the waves, it drifts away to the west coast of Scotland, or maybe it is carried by the Gulf Stream to the north-west coast of

Europe. But, strange to say, ten out of every twelve of the St. Kilda mails reach their destination in safety. One was sent off to myself after I left the island, and it arrived at my home in Middlesex on the 18th of January following, none the worse for its perilous journey across eighty miles of water. It was picked up by a cattle-herd on the island of Barra, almost the most southerly point in the Outer Hebrides. The man could not read, and thought he had found a treasure. But after keeping the letters for a week he showed them to his master, and he, it is interesting to know, was a nephew of the late William MacGillivray, who, some years ago, wrote a book on British Birds. He at once posted the letters to me, and so they reached their destination, and it seemed all the more remarkable that the poster of these letters should have been a friend of ours whom we visited during our stay in those western islands.

During a terrible storm which once swept across the island and did a deal of damage, urgent messages asking for help were sent in this way. Not very many days later the letters were picked up and a boat with provisions, &c., was at once sent to the distressed islanders.

My visit to the home of the Fulmar Petrel will long be remembered, and although I had to rough it, I am looking forward to another visit to this most westerly of those wild islands of the northern sea.

V

THE RAVEN

WHEN I first began to study birds, and I was a very diminutive boy in those days, I always looked upon the Raven as a great and noble bird, and one too that I should never see in a wild state. My interest in the bird was also aroused, because not many paces from my home the group of trees stand, in which the last pair of Middlesex Ravens had their nest. The Raven was always associated in my mind with romance, and it was one of my ambitions to look upon the tame Raven at the Tower of London. Those days were happy times, and I remember how a friend and myself used to escape to the orchards and the woods on every

available opportunity, and many a time I was accused by my parents of wasting my time. If only, they said, I would read more, and let the birds and butterflies alone, it would be much better for me. But somehow or other I *could not* let the birds alone. The country appealed to me; I loved it; and the trees, the flowers, and the birds called me to them, and I simply had to obey. And as I look back on those first days in Birdland, I am not sorry that I listened to the voices of the woods, for I know that the little messages they gave me then, have made me a better man.

Ten years after I first took an interest in birds, found me with my camera, on my way to the Raven's haunt, and I looked forward to my first visit to the hills with very keen interest, and I even had doubts as to whether I should, after all, see the big black outlaw that haunts the wildest mountains. But soon after I reached the

wilds I had an opportunity of seeing the Raven in his own home, and I was not disappointed with the meeting, and a few days later, after hanging at the end of a rope for an hour, I succeeded in exposing the first photograph ever taken, showing the interior of the nest and the markings on the eggs, and I was, of course, not a little pleased with my success.

Since then I have found and photographed several nests of this rare bird, with more or less success. Three years ago I went to Wales with the determination to photograph the Raven itself. I knew that it would be a difficult task. I had previously engaged the services of a friendly keeper, who takes as much interest in my photographic expeditions as I do myself. He is a thorough sportsman, and is as keen on a day's photographic work, as he is on a day with rod or gun. This keeper had found the nest for me and made all preparations, and

so I lost no time in hurrying to the tiny village, and the next day set to work.

The climb to the nest was a desperate one. As I went along the cliff-side with my camera, the keeper and a shepherd were watching my progress. The old shepherd was at the top of the opposite cliff, for the nest was built in a steep and wild dingle between two great hills. He was lying full length on the grass, and he told me afterwards that he was exceedingly anxious for my safety, and that every footstep that I made, he expected to be my last. Every time he saw me go forward he clutched the grass nervously, and closed his eyes tightly, but, strange to say, every time he opened them I was still on the cliff! Many and many a time this shepherd has told the story to admiring listeners in the little village inn, over his evening jug of beer, and each year as I visit this

favourite haunt he reminds me of the incident.

After a really difficult climb I did manage to get to the place I wanted to reach, and then waited for my friend the Raven. He came at last, and I quickly focussed him in the finder of my Birdland camera, but just as the shutter clicked, his wings were opened and he was away. But he came again, and this time I secured the accompanying illustration, and it well repaid me for all my trouble.

A year later I visited this same dingle again, and found that the Ravens had used a nest about fifty yards higher up. When I got close to this I saw that it contained two large youngsters. The two parents showed their anger at my approach by flying over my head and uttering loud vicious barks, and several times the hen swooped down, and I could hear the whistling of her wings

A RAVEN PHOTOGRAPHED NEAR HIS NEST ON A PRECIPITOUS WELSH CLIFF.

(Note the cunning expression in the bird's eye.)

as she passed. I have often thought that if these large birds had the pluck of the smaller species, it would be almost impossible to approach their nests. I have had Warblers and other small species attack me, but the larger the bird the less inclination they seem to have to come near us. There is a pair of Buzzards in a certain part of Wales, however, which are exceedingly bold, and one of the birds will attack an intruder. This bird flies up overhead, then spreading its wings and tail, swoops down within arm's length. I have never known it to actually strike a person, but each spring it attempts to defend its nest in this novel, and to some people terrifying, manner.

The young Ravens were almost ready to fly, and so I watched the nest carefully, for I hoped I should be able to obtain some pictures of them. A few days later I was successful in this, for on

reaching the nest I found one youngster had completely disappeared, and the other flew from the nest on my approach. There was no sign of the first young bird, and as the parents were far out over the moor, I conjectured that they had enticed it as far as possible away from the nest, owing to my repeated visits. I followed the remaining young bird from rock to rock, but this was no easy task, and it led me a long and tiring chase, and as it was going farther into the heart of the dingle, where the rocks were steep and dangerous, we thought the best plan would be to drive it back on to the open moor.

The keeper and myself then worked round it, and tried to drive it in the direction we wished, and after nearly half a day's work were successful. We had him at last away from the cliffs, and by carefully going towards him I was able to obtain quite a good series of photographs.

This pair of Ravens had made two attempts at nesting in the season of which I am writing. I saw the first nest in March; it contained four eggs, and we made attempts to photograph it. I had to manipulate the camera while on a rope, and it was one of the most awkward places I ever worked in. There was really no place in which to put the tripod. The only thing to do was to bunch the three legs up, then drive them into the side of the cliff over a narrow ledge, while my companion, also coming down the rope, stood on the end of the tripod resting on this ledge and so steadied it. I made six exposures, all of which were successful. It was a bitterly cold day, and there was actually ice in the nest, and before we photographed it the birds had deserted it. This nest was in a curious position; a quantity of water dripped into it: this had fallen on the eggs, and probably

also on the sitting bird and caused her to desert it. But they very soon repaired a nest in the next dingle, and were quite successful, for it was there that I photographed the young bird.

Last spring (1909) was a rough time for the birds of the hills. All through the nesting season the weather was cold and wet, and certainly it was the very worst season I ever experienced for photography. Day after day I returned wet through; one day I shall never forget. I was attempting to photograph the Kestrel. The nest was on a ledge on the cliff, and on a narrow ledge above there was just room to place my bird tent. This was put in position and left there for a day and night, then I went inside, and my friend Brook covered me in and went away, intending to call again about six or seven hours later. Very soon after he left a heavy cloud came up, and made it far too dark for

photography, and then the rain came down—just that real heavy mountain rain that I have mentioned elsewhere. For a time my tent kept me dry, but as the rain increased in force it soaked through, and about an hour later at least six separate streams were pouring in. One of these was finding its way down my neck, another was running all over my kinematograph, the others were wetting my knees and back. I could not move, but had to sit and wait; hour after hour went by, and each minute I was getting colder and more wet. Photography, of course, was out of the question, and I just crouched up as near the rock as possible and endeavoured to keep cheerful until Brook returned. When I saw him coming down the hill, the reader can imagine my feelings, and he soon helped me out, and we both trudged home over the rain-sodden moor. The next day I tried again, but it was far

too dark for successful photography, owing to the heavy rainclouds. Before leaving I placed two of the young Kestrels on a branch and photographed them, for I did not like leaving this cliff without one relic to remind me of my labours.

The Raven is nothing like such a desperate robber as the Carrion Crow. The latter is without the slightest doubt the very worst feathered enemy of the farmer. In the lambing season he will swoop down upon any weak or helpless lamb and quickly kill it, while the Raven will not touch a sheep or lamb while life remains in it. I have been severely called to book by my friend, the week-end critic, for making this statement, but I will challenge any one to bring forward evidence that the Raven will attack a live lamb. I have had at my disposal the evidence of shepherds and farmers who have lived all their life in the Raven's haunt, and all without exception

June 8, 1921 "Daily Mail" says two ravens attacked a sick ewe with a lamb, picked out its eyes, then killed it, & belonging Loweswater Hotel near Cockermouth

NEST OF THE RAVEN PHOTOGRAPHED *IN SITU*, ON A STEEP WELSH CLIFF.

(The Author and his assistant were lowered with ropes, and while suspended on these operated the camera.)

back up my statement. The Raven is far and away too wary a bird to attack a live creature larger than itself, and I am right in saying that on the Welsh hills the Raven seldom touches a dead lamb or sheep until after some other bird of prey has been at it.

The Raven, like the Buzzard, has two nests, and these are often, but not always, used alternately. In one dingle that I know, there are three old nests which have been there to my knowledge for six years. Which bird originally built the nests I do not know—probably the Buzzard is responsible for two, and the Raven built the other; but the nests are used by both species of birds, and as all three nests are in favourable positions for photography, this special dingle is a favourite of mine.

I rather like the word dingle, but it is far too picturesque to describe some of the spots I have seen rejoicing in the

name. But taking these clefts between the great barren hills on a whole it is more than appropriate.

A few weeks ago (January, 1910), I was in a wild and beautiful part of Wales. It was about 3.30 in the afternoon and I was waiting for a carriage. As I stood by the roadside for about twenty minutes, I saw four Ravens, six Buzzards, and two Kites, not a bad record for so short a time.

The Great-crested Grebe on Nest.

VI

IN THE PHALAROPE'S HAUNT

THERE are some of our rarest breeding birds which are only found in remote corners of these islands, and I do not think I know anything more fascinating than tracking some of our rare and large birds of prey to their lairs. Many a time I have spent days and even weeks in following up their tracks, and when we at last see these noble birds in their mountain fastnesses, we feel well repaid for our trouble, for there is something wonderfully attractive in these large outlaws of the air, as they have been called. But I do not think I ever felt better satisfied than when, after days and nights of travelling by train and boat, I at last, in one of the remote

Orkney Islands, discovered the breeding haunt of the Red-necked Phalarope.

This is a bird that many of my readers have probably never seen, for it is only found breeding in the Orkney and Shetland Islands, the Outer Hebrides, and certain parts of Ireland. They arrive in their breeding quarters in the latter part of May and leave again in August.

I have seen most of the breeding haunts of the Phalarope, but the one that I first looked upon, and which forms the subject of this chapter, was, as I mentioned before, in the Orkneys. It was a low-lying island, and on it there was a narrow loch, several hundred yards in length. Surrounding this there was a large marshy tract, with large colonies of Black-headed Gulls, Common Gulls, and Terns nesting thereon.

This seemed an ideal haunt for marsh birds, and Dunlins were there in plenty, also Snipe, Coots, Moorhens, and several

species of Duck, including that rare breeding species the Pintail. We were fortunate to find the nest of the latter. For several hours we had seen the Duck swimming on the water, but she refused to give us any clue as to where the nest was; but when we were preparing to leave, on the evening of our second visit to this spot, we saw the Duck fly from the water, and settle in a large clump of tall grass some little distance inland. We gave her a few minutes to settle, then ran forward and were rewarded by finding the nest with its seven eggs.

When we first visited this haunt the weather looked far from promising. After a little trouble we were able to hire a pony and trap, both rather ancient, to take us the ten miles between our inn and the loch. Just before reaching the latter, we left the pony and trap at one of the crofters' cottages, and went the rest of the journey on foot.

When about four hundred yards from the water I heard a cry from my friend Paton. I went towards him and learned that he had discovered with his keen eyes a nest containing one egg, and on examination we recognised it as belonging to the Red-necked Phalarope. Fortune seemed to be smiling upon us ; we exposed a plate, and then marked the spot, deciding to photograph it again when the full clutch was laid.

Going down to the loch we searched well with our Goerz binoculars, but there were no Phalaropes in sight. However, after tramping over the marsh, we at last saw a small bird fly swiftly past, and then settle on the lake. My camera was quickly ready, and then I began to go towards it, while my two friends went some distance beyond, and endeavoured to drive the bird towards me. Here, then, was the bird that I had travelled so far to see. It looked almost like a diminutive Moorhen, or perhaps it resembled

more closely in its actions the Water Rail; but its movements were far more rapid than either, and it seemed as if it would not be an easy bird to photograph. The solitary bird was now joined by its mate, and also another pair, and I gradually followed the four birds up to the end of the loch. Our troubles now began. Since we first saw the birds it had been raining, but now the wind rose in power, the still water was turned into a miniature sea, and the rain came down like ropes. In a few moments the photographers were wet through to the skin, for no mackintoshes could stand that onslaught of the elements. The wind turned into a wild gale, and the heavy rain was driving and hissing into the lake. Yet all the time the four Phalaropes were swimming daintily on the water, and rising and falling gracefully over the waves. Never did a photographer have such an opportunity of getting so near to the birds

that he wanted, for they swam right up to us and yet took no notice. And never did a photographer fight against such odds. As we were about as wet as it was possible to get, we went in the water after the birds; I kept my camera under my coat, then turning my back to the gale, tried to wipe the water from the lens, and when this was accomplished, lifted the apparatus as quickly as possible and made an exposure, but although I was rapid in my movements, before I could focus and release the shutter, the camera was again drenched with the driving rain. Very reluctantly we had to give in, and making our way across the sodden meadow, to a small roadside cottage, put up under the shelter of the walls and packed our apparatus. It was a long time before my camera recovered from this cold bath.

The crofters, on finding we were waiting outside, insisted upon our going in; a large fire was lighted for our benefit,

and we endeavoured to dry our soaking clothes, and taking some of them off, we sat in front of a good peat fire and devoured our lunch. But the clothes refused to dry, and as the storm showed no signs of going, we put the wet clothes in the trap, and wrapping our mackintoshes around us, followed, and tried hard to keep cheerful for a ten-mile drive behind one of the slowest ponies that has ever been in harness. Our cheery old driver entertained us to the best of his ability, and we in our turn endeavoured to give him graphic descriptions of London life. As his longest journey was just across to the coast of Scotland, his knowledge of the world was very limited, and as he listened to the stories about the crowded cities, the huge buildings, and the museums and theatres, his eyes opened in genuine surprise, and he even forgot to shout his monotonous *coom-ang* to the sleepy pony. Once or twice, we even managed to get

a sly dig into the pony's hind-quarters without our driver noticing it, and this did have the effect of making the lazy animal raise its head and go a few yards at a faster rate. We enquired of our man if there were any rules of the road in the Orkneys, and which side he usually passed a vehicle. His reply was, that he didn't know, and we came to the conclusion that his pony had never passed anything on the open road, so perhaps it was unnecessary for him to know! But every journey has its end, and by the time that every ounce of cheerfulness had left us, and even our old driver had long since ceased his *coom-angs*, we came in sight of our inn. And so ended our first adventure in the Phalarope's haunt.

We did not expect to be at this island long, and we certainly did not bargain for weather like this, and for this reason I had not brought a change of clothes with me. But our host informed me that

A PAIR OF RED-NECKED PHALAROPES AND THEIR NEST.

(The larger photograph was taken in a violent storm.)

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he could easily rig me out. As he was a big man and nearly twice my size I had many misgivings, but his cheerfulness somewhat reassured me. After a good bath I went into my room and found some of the clothes ready for me. I put these on, and then got into the trousers. Into, is the only word that really expresses it. These huge garments came nearly up to my neck, and then there were several inches hanging loose beyond my toes, and at this stage my host shouted to me that he would send the coat up in a few minutes. I replied that he needn't trouble about that, as the other garments completely covered me! I went down to dinner in this remarkable garb, and when the maid brought in the soup, and saw the strange object sitting by the fire, she gave out a very English expression of surprise, and almost dropped the tray!

During the night the storm calmed down, and the next day was almost perfect for photography. Again hiring our pony

and its driver, we made another journey to the loch. But when we reached it the Phalaropes were not to be seen. However, after tramping over a good part of the marsh we found them on a small pool. As soon as they saw the photographer they left this spot and went to the loch, and there for several hours I stalked them with my camera. They were not easy birds to photograph, owing to their exceedingly restless habits, but fear of man seemed to be an unknown quality with them. By going slowly forward, I repeatedly got within three yards of them, but not once was I able to approach as closely as I did on the previous day. Practically every second, the lively little creatures were shooting out their beaks to pick up insects, and occasionally they would make a big splashing in the shallow water, and turn rapidly round. I rather fancy they did this to stir up the insects at the bottom of the loch, for immediately

afterwards they seemed to find a large quantity of food to devour. Then they would clean themselves, by quickly ducking their heads and allowing the water thrown on their backs to trickle down the feathers, but not a single moment would they keep still.

As I stalked towards my delightful little subjects, a large screaming flock of Common Gulls were flying around, and once while I was knee-deep in water, carefully following a Phalarope, I felt a stinging blow on the back of my head. I was not wearing a cap, and looking round I saw a vicious Common Gull swooping up, and uttering some angry notes which were no doubt directed at me; many times this bird returned to the attack, although it only struck me once. Later in the day we found another nest of the Phalarope, and as there only seemed to be two pairs on the whole of the loch, we were very fortunate in discovering both their homes.

The female Phalarope might be described as the "new woman" of Birdland. It is she who courts the males, and it is no uncommon sight to see two of these amazons engaged in a desperate fight over a male. With their long necks stretched low on the water they will swim round and round, and then dash in and peck wildly at one another. All the time the poor male will sit by, looking utterly dejected and miserable, for as soon as one of the fighters attempts to "make up" to him, she is promptly bowled over by her opponent. Then it is the overworked male who has to undertake most of the duties of sitting on the eggs; first he constructs most of the nest, then, when this is ready, the hen lays the eggs, and he afterwards does most of the incubating for just over a fortnight, while his up-to-date mate is sporting herself on the water. Later, when the young arrive, all the chief duties of the parent fall upon

his poor shoulders, but at last he has the proud satisfaction of seeing the family grown up and able to look after themselves.

I have seen and photographed these fascinating birds in the Hebrides, where there are one or two colonies, and in some of these they are very efficiently protected, but in the Orkney Islands it was almost hopeless for the birds to attempt to breed. During my travels in Birdland I have come across many sad scenes through the ravages of the egg collector. But never in my experience have I seen anything to equal the war of extermination that is going on among the birds of the Orkney Islands.

Day after day, certain of the natives are literally waiting at the nests for the birds to lay. The first, second, and third clutches of eggs are ruthlessly taken, and large boxes of the rarest eggs are constantly being sent off to dealers and collectors in our chief towns. In a cottage

on a remote island I saw one case addressed to a certain London collector, and it must have contained hundreds of eggs, and yet I believe this collector boasts that he will have no eggs in his collection unless he actually takes them with his own hands. I could not help wondering at the time, why he should encourage wholesale collecting like this, and whether he had any idea, how purchasing eggs in this way, was encouraging the natives to actually exterminate the rare breeding species on that island.

We cannot entirely blame the natives who take the eggs, for the prices they receive for them are a very substantial addition to their scanty earnings. It is the dealers, and collectors such as I have mentioned, who are to blame, and our rarest breeding birds are doomed unless these gentlemen stop their destructive habits. This statement is no idle bogey, it is a startling fact. I have seen most

RED-NECKED PHALAROPES SWAM DAINTILY ON THE SMALL LOCKS.

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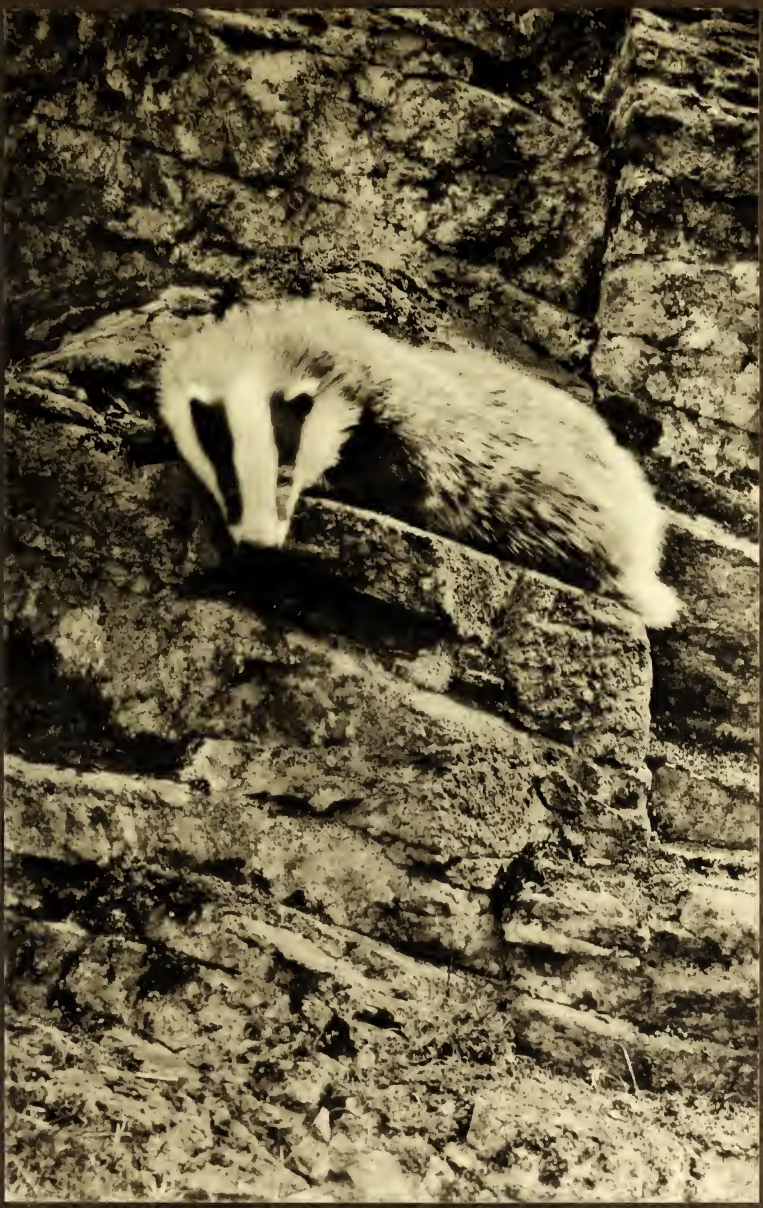
of the breeding haunts of our rarest British birds and spent weeks and even months in them, and I speak from a sad experience. It is simply appalling how many districts are completely cleared of eggs. There is one man, who perhaps has done, and is doing more to attempt the extermination of our rare Welsh mountain birds than any one who has ever taken to collecting. He has filled his own cabinets to overflowing, and not being content with this, is year after year sending men down to the locality with marked maps, so that they can go straight to the nests. Unfortunately, there is a market amongst wealthy collectors for such maps, and no doubt this man does well out of it, but it is a deed that all right-thinking and genuine collectors would turn their backs upon. But the irony of the whole thing is, that this more than remarkable man poses as one of the most devout bird protectors! It

would be hard to find a parallel to this in the whole wide world!

The Red-necked Phalarope is no exception to this wholesale destruction. We did our best to protect the nests found, and well paid a man to watch, but a few days after we had left the island, a postcard arrived to say the eggs had been taken. This same man told us that he had lived by this loch for twenty-five years, and during the whole of that time the birds had not increased in numbers. This he put down entirely to the large numbers of collectors who annually visited the haunt.

It seems more than hopeless to make these egg-looters realise that there is a much greater army of naturalists and bird-lovers who would rather, for one brief hour, look upon a rare bird in its wild haunt, and also its nest, than be the possessor of a stuffed specimen, or a clutch of empty egg-shells.



The Badger.

VII

ON A NORTHERN MOOR

I

TWO years ago we spent a few days on one of the wildest of the islands of the Outer Hebrides. Our small inn stood all alone by the roadside, resembling more than anything else a square box. Leading to this little inn there was a long straight road three miles in length, and for the best part of that distance, as we first drove along it, we could see our miniature hotel, looking from a distance like a dolls'-house stuck in the middle of a small green meadow. But although the house looked almost too small to contain three of us, and a formidable collection of luggage,

consisting of cameras, kinematograph, fishing rods, and the many necessary accessories, we found on entering that we should be very comfortable, and certainly our hostess did her best to make us thoroughly happy.

The view from our windows was wild and bleak in the extreme. On one side we could clearly hear the roar of the Atlantic, as the waves rolled up the long sandy western shore, and there are few sounds quite like this. The deep bass song of these northern seas seems to speak of loneliness. As you stand and listen to it at midnight, as I have sometimes done, one feels that he is indeed in a lonely and far-away spot; it is a weird and uncanny song, this music of the breaking waves—a long continued muffled roar. On the other side of our inn was a great open moor, stretching away to a steep hill about three miles away, which quite cut off the view in that direction. Nearer

the road which passed the front of the house, there were several meadows with many long-horned and hairy cattle feeding in them, and these shaggy beasts, although rather dangerous looking, are quite gentle, and a picturesque addition to the bleak open fields. In the months of June and July the Hebridean meadows are a really remarkable sight, for they are quite white with a vast crop of daisies. I have never seen anything like this anywhere. From a short distance one could easily imagine that you were looking upon a winter landscape, for when you are not near enough to actually distinguish the flowers, they are so thick that they resemble snow. Although we were in one of the byways of Birdland, this little English daisy gave a touch of home to the otherwise wild scene. The Skylark's song and the little white daisy are just two small links of nature that seem to add a feeling of real happiness to the traveller wherever he may

be; they speak to him of the English home-land—and there is no spot on this great round globe quite like that. Where in this vast world can you find the equal of our Hertfordshire lanes, with their flowers and song; or those stretches of golden and green commons of Surrey, or the peaceful and well-wooded corners of Middlesex?

When we first wandered out over the moors we soon realised that this was one of the unbeaten tracks of Birdland, for we came across several little-known birds, species that not very many bird-lovers have the privilege of seeing in a wild state. We made for the distant hill, for when in a strange country it is always as well to first find a high coign of vantage and take in your bearings.

The week that we spent in this haunt happened to be one of the very hottest weeks ever experienced in these islands, and even the oldest inhabitant—that important individual who is even found in

such out-of-the-way spots as this—had never known anything like it. And, certainly, it was an experience we shall not readily forget.

When one is burdened with a heavy camera, it is rather warm work travelling over a rough moor in ordinary summer weather, but when the thermometer stands at 70 degrees in the shade, and there is very little if any wind, and no shelter, it is really exceedingly hot and tiring work. We discarded coats, waistcoats, and collars, and yet found it some of the warmest labour we had experienced, and the chief idea of my two companions seemed to be, to discover a loch in which they could swim and so keep cool. To add to our discomfort, the whole place was infested with horse-flies, and these vicious creatures were continually biting us.

After a toilsome climb we reached the summit of the hill, and the view on the other side was typical of these islands,

and so gigantic that it would be impossible to do justice to it with a small camera. A large loch lay immediately below us, and then beyond this, and stretching away for miles, there was a vast stretch of moorland, covered with countless lochs of curious and fantastic shapes, some standing alone, but many joined together with small thin lanes of water.

It is always an exciting moment when the keen bird-lover first looks upon a rare bird, and one that he has never seen in a wild state before. On the large loch below us there were many birds swimming, and with our powerful Goerz field-glasses we easily picked out the Grey-lag Goose and the Black-throated Diver, two birds that these three naturalists had travelled many hundreds of miles to see. For a long time we lay concealed in the tall heather watching the movements of these rare species, and we felt sure that the Black-throated

Diver had a nest on one of the numerous small islands. By carefully observing the movements of a bird it is often possible to discover the exact spot in which the nest is built, but this Diver gave us very little help in this way; but we came to the conclusion that the eggs ought to be on a certain small grass-covered island about one hundred yards from the shore. My two aquatic friends, not having had a bathe that morning, at once volunteered to swim out to it, and I believe were only too glad of an excuse to get into the water on this exceedingly hot day. However, on attempting the feat, they found the island was farther than it looked, but they succeeded in getting to it, and after a lengthy search could find no trace of the Diver's nest. The remaining islands were too far away, and as there was no boat on the loch, we had to return disappointed.

We felt so sure that there was a nest somewhere on the islands, that we made arrangements with the keeper to get a boat on to the loch. About four days later we met the keeper early; with us we took my two cameras, for if we found the Diver's nest it was my intention to get some animated pictures of the bird. We first had to row across one large loch, and then our difficulties began, for it was necessary to drag the rather heavy boat over nearly half a mile of rough heather-covered moorland. This is no easy task under favourable conditions, but on such a hot day we found it to be very hard work. We were only able to drag our burden about four or six yards at the time, for over half the distance the moor rose, but when we reached the summit of the small hill, it was easier work, for we were able to make it run down some of the more sloping parts on the way to the loch.

NEST AND HAUNT OF THE RED-THROATED DIVER.

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But even now, there were several deep ditches which we had to lift our boat over, but at last we had the satisfaction of seeing our craft floating on the water.

When rowing slowly over a wild unfrequented stretch of water like this, one is bound to see many interesting sights. Two Red-throated Divers flew over us, and occasionally a startled but very inquisitive Stag would jump up in the heather on the banks, and look wonderingly at the four intruders, then he would sniff the air, run on a few paces, hesitate, and look at us again. Soon after this we saw a short but exciting hunt by a Short-eared Owl. The bird was silently quartering over the heather, when a Pipit flew up close by the hunter. He instantly gave chase, and the terrified bird flew madly onwards, and twisted and turned in attempting to dodge his enemy; but it was no good, the larger bird snapped him up and flew onwards

to a convenient knoll on which to devour his prey, and just one or two small feathers floating slowly down were all that was left to show that a Birdland tragedy had taken place.

As we passed slowly over the still surface of the loch we soon came in view of one of the Black-throated Divers, and as there was only one about we felt certain that the hen was sitting somewhere. Every small island was carefully searched, but not a sign of the nest could we find. At length there was only one islet that had not been visited, and when we reached this, the nest was discovered, but alas! there were no eggs in it, and a careful examination proved that the young had only very recently left the shells, and had decamped with their mother! It was a big disappointment after all our trouble, but there was nothing to do but just return without a photograph, and the worst part of the

whole journey was dragging that boat back over the heather. When one starts on a task like this in the early part of the day full of eager hope it is not so bad, but when returning at the end of the day without having exposed a single plate—well, the work seems doubly hard.

During the past two nesting seasons I have had to put up with so many great disappointments that I am beginning to get quite used to them. One, however, was really galling. I had made all preparation to photograph a rare bird feeding its young. My companion had spent nearly a whole week in making preparations for my visit. A splendid shelter had been built near the nest, in which to hide, and after constructing this, my friend went inside, and almost immediately after, the Hawk returned with food for her young. She sat on the edge of the nest and pulled the prey

to pieces, giving each young bird a portion, then she settled down, and seemed quite unconcerned as to the strange shelter that had sprung up near her home. On the day appointed we went to the nest. It was one of the few really hot fine days in the exceedingly wet season of 1909. We were up at 5.30 a.m., caught the first train, went for ten miles in this; then had a long walk over the Welsh hills, which lasted nearly two hours. On our backs we had the camera and kinematograph and about thirty pounds weight of other apparatus, and by the time we reached the keeper's cottage the reader can imagine that we had a keen appetite, and we did full justice to a good breakfast which had been prepared for our arrival. Then we set out once more, through the woods this time, and about twenty minutes later came in sight of the shelter, but first we went to the nest, when, judge of our dismay, we found

all the young were quite dead! The parents had evidently been trapped or shot in the interval between the last visit, and so we had to go the whole of the distance back, two of the most disappointed photographers who ever attempted to photograph a bird.

But I am digressing. Let us return to the northern moor.

Not succeeding on this occasion in photographing the Black-throated Diver, we turned our attention to the Richardson's Skua and the Red-throated Diver. I tried the latter first. The nest was built on the edge of a very small loch. There was no dry ground anywhere near, so I placed my bird tent close to the water and about four yards away from the nest. The former was quite covered over with heather, and I went inside with my two cameras, placed my kinematograph in position, and everything was arranged and my friends left me. Very soon after

their departure I heard a swish of wings overhead, and then a loud splash in the water, and I knew that the Diver had returned. I peered through one of the small peep-holes of my tent, and saw the ripples on the surface of the loch, and then the bird appeared only a few feet away. She was swimming cautiously around, eyeing the strange pile near her home, and after she had spent nearly half an hour in doing this, she went slowly towards her nest.

The Red-throated Diver builds her nest close to the edge of the water, owing to the difficulty she has of walking. You can hardly call it a walk. She really jumps along the ground, rising on her legs and then throwing herself forward on to her breast, and so on. This bird remained in the water for a long time, as close as she could get to her eggs, and then she suddenly leapt forward and shuffled on to her nest. I instantly

THE RICHARDSON'S SKUA LAYS ITS EGGS ON THE LONELIEST MOORS OF THE NORTHERN ISLANDS.

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began turning the handle of my bioscope, and it is interesting to know, that since then, over five hundred thousand people have thus been able to look upon living pictures of this rare bird, as she climbed on to her nest, and swam about this secluded little loch hidden away in one of the remotest byways of Birdland. The kinematograph is a wonderful means of bringing home to an audience the wonders of Birdland, and since I originated this work a few years ago, many a bird which is only to be seen in the wildest and most inaccessible spots in these islands, has lived its life again before an interested audience.

After exposing a long length of film on this bird I prepared my other camera, for there was not room in my small tent to work both at once. I took the bioscope off the tripod and placed my quarter-plate camera in its place. I made three exposures, and these were

not at all successful, and then the bird's mate arrived and she left the nest. The male bird was very suspicious. He called the hen away, and they both swam about near the nest, but not near enough for me to expose a plate. I had already been under my tent for four hours, practically doubled up in a most uncomfortable position and sitting in a pool of water. I waited another hour and still the hen refused to return. Every few seconds the two birds uttered their weird note. When they do this, they stretch their long necks out straight in front of them, and lay them on the water, and then give out a strange guttural noise. It is one of the most remarkable notes I have ever heard. Try to imagine an exceedingly crusty old man suffering from acute gout. He would naturally give out a few awful groans. That is what the Divers' note sounded like. It was repeated about

The Fox.

every ten seconds right through the hour. Still I waited on, hoping she would allow me to take another photograph, but not once did she go near the nest. The male Diver had evidently scented danger, and warned her. Those notes were maddening and frightfully monotonous, and for another hour this game of patience was played by two determined parties. At last the notes ceased. I eagerly looked through a peep-hole, placed my hand on the trigger of the camera, and waited. But not a sign of the bird could I see. Then I looked through another hole and endeavoured to scan the whole loch, and eventually spotted those two aggravating birds just underneath my tent. There they were, with their heads tucked over on to their backs, and fast asleep! This was too much even for me. I crept slowly out of my hiding-place, then jumped up and shouted. The vast surprise of those

two birds was really ludicrous to watch; there they remained for a second or two, transfixed with alarm at the sudden appearance of a human being so near to them, and it seemed to me that this was really ample revenge for all the annoyance they had caused me. I gave another shout, their wings were opened, there was a great splashing on the water, and a moment or two later more than a mile divided us.

Now I had to pack up. There was quite a heap of apparatus which had been carried to this spot by three assistants, but as they were gone I had to attempt it all myself. The tent with its framework, the kinematograph and films, the camera, slides and plates, changing bag and tripod made a very formidable pile of luggage, but I managed to sling a lot of this on to my back, and holding the rest in my hands I trudged forward, over the moor and towards the sinking sun.

For over a mile I went on, with the scorching sun almost firing my face, and with a small crowd of those vicious horse-flies following. They settled on my hands and face, and it was almost impossible to drive them away. One specially spiteful fly alighted on the back of my neck, and almost before I knew it was there, it gave me a stinging bite. I pulled up short, called it something very uncomplimentary, and danced a miniature Highland fling! The result was that the cameras rolled off my back, and the lens on the kinematograph was badly broken; luckily it fell on soft ground or the damage might have been far worse. However, at last I found my friends, and dividing the luggage, we tramped back to our small inn, and never was a place of rest more welcome, and we did almost more than justice to the hearty repast which our hostess had provided for us.

VIII

ON A NORTHERN MOOR
(continued)

II

WHEN quite alone on those great open moors of the northern and western islands of Scotland, you begin to understand what real solitude is. I do not think I ever felt more alone in the world, than when hiding in my small bird tent attempting to photograph the Red-throated Diver, described in the last chapter. As I looked through the small peep-holes in my canvas covering, I could see nothing but vast open stretches of grey and green moor, great grey hills, and water. The only sounds were the

cries of birds, sometimes the weird, ghostly note of the Divers, or the deep sounding *kee-wonk* of the Wild Geese. And then to add to the loneliness, a solitary Stag could be seen standing on a hillock, and sniffing the air, but he trotted onwards, and left me in that great silent open tract alone.

I had another experience on this same moor. While I had been spending a day under my tent, my friends had improved the time between their sojourns in the water by searching for a nest of the Richardson's Skua. This bird makes practically no nest, but just lays her egg in a small hollow in the ground. There were not very many pairs of Skuas on the moor, but they were fortunate in finding one egg.

There was no cover of any kind near, and very little heather, so we first of all dug a hole about three feet deep in the peat, and placed the tent over that. Then we pulled up some of the coarse grass

and a few pieces of heather and attempted to cover it. The whole thing was left in this position for twenty-four hours.

The next day was another of those desperately hot days, and as we slowly trudged over the two miles of moorland and crossed a large loch, hundreds of biting flies followed us, and attacked every unprotected part of our persons. When we got within sight of the tent, we searched with our field-glasses and were delighted to find that the Skua was comfortably settled on her egg, and evidently did not object to the strange erection which had sprung up close to her. But as we approached closer, her mate, which was on a prominent mound, gave a warning cry, and both were up and away.

My readers can judge of the feelings of the photographer, who intended to spend a day under the tent, when he discovered that the hole had filled with black peat-water during the night! But this was

not all, for some very lively and exceedingly energetic insects had also found their way into the water! However, these are details which the bird-photographer must put up with, and as it was such a warm day, I partially stripped, and made myself as comfortable as I could in the water, first of all getting my kinematograph ready. Then my companions covered me over, wished me good luck, and of course made a bee-line for the loch, for on these hot days the water attracted them like honey attracts bees, and they spent a good part of the day in dodging the horse-flies, by keeping as much as possible under the cool water of the loch.

Very soon after they left, those hungry insects in the water in which I was sitting insisted on attempting to make a hearty meal on my unprotected legs, and more than once I called them names which I am sure my publishers would not print if I took the trouble to write them! After

I had been under cover about twenty minutes I heard a swish of wings overhead, and then with a graceful swoop the beautiful bird alighted close to her eggs. I instantly began to turn the handle of my kinematograph, and before another hour had passed I had secured a fine series of animated pictures.

Now I wanted the Skua to leave, so that when she returned I might get a picture of her in a different position. At first I whistled to her, and as she took no notice of this, I tried talking, gently at first and then louder, and just at this moment a Hooded Crow flew slowly past. The Skua evidently thought the sound proceeded from him, for she had been looking in every direction before his appearance, but instantly she raised her head and gave out many angry notes. At last I shouted, but instead of leaving, she replied to every shout with a loud harsh note. It seemed that I never should

NEST, EGGS, AND YOUNG OF THE COMMON GULL.

(Four eggs is a very unusual clutch, three only are usually laid.)

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get her to leave, and as all my previous efforts had proved futile, I broke out into song. Now, whether it was my bad singing, or my still worse Scottish accent—for I tried a Highland tune—I cannot tell, but the bird left the egg she was guarding so bravely, and actually began to attack the tent under which I was hiding! She flew straight at it, circled round and about my head, and made one or two vicious darts at the canvas covering the photographer; after she had vented her feelings sufficiently she returned to her eggs, and as she alighted I made an interesting snap-shot.

Altogether I remained in hiding for just over four hours, and then crawled out of the water, and stretched my rather cramped and much-bitten limbs. The surprise of the Skua was great when she first really realised who it was who had made the strange noises—sounds such as I am certain she had never heard before! When she saw my head and shoulders

appearing from underneath the heap of heather and grass, she was so startled that she simply sat and gazed at the strange being, and then with a loud cry she opened her long and beautiful wings and joined her mate in a noisy confab in the air above. I packed up my apparatus, carried this to the boat, and before rowing away, had a dip in the cool water of the loch, which I found far more refreshing than the black peat-water in which I had been sitting.

I had another interesting experience with the Skuas on a large moor in the Orkney Islands. We spent nearly a fortnight on the wildest island of this group, and on the large flat summit of a hill, found a large colony of these graceful birds. The plumage of the Skua varies very considerably. Some are dark brown all over, others are brown and white, and the ignorant would undoubtedly think there were two species of birds in the

same colony. It was rather late in the season, and we had extreme difficulty in discovering a nest with an egg, but with the keeper's help we were at last successful. There were plenty of young birds about—the majority were only about three days out of their shell. It was easy to find these by following a certain plan. As we wandered about the moor one of the angry and excited birds overhead would settle. This was a sure sign that we were near the nest. Then this bird would do her utmost to attract us away, and I noticed that she always drew us direct from the young. By immediately going in exactly the opposite direction she would soon settle again in another spot, and again endeavour to attract the intruder in a straight line away from her youngster. Now by repeating this three or four times, and noticing in which direction she attracted you, and drawing two or three imaginary lines, you could tell almost

exactly where the small sooty bird was hiding. The young Skua is one of the fluffiest and certainly the prettiest of young birds I have ever seen.

Near the solitary egg that we found, we built quite a substantial little shelter of heather, and the next morning we all trudged up the steep hill leading to this, for I intended to spend the day there to add to my series of Skua photographs. As we started from the roadside, a veterinary surgeon from London overtook us, and thought he would like to join in this rather novel little expedition. He was a big, tall man, and rigged out as he was in the latest style of leggings, &c., he looked good for a thirty-mile tramp. But alas! appearances are sometimes deceptive, for before we were half-way up he was "done" and had to remain behind, resting in the tall heather. There are few places that try you like some of these Northern moors. The ground underneath

the tall heather is rough in the extreme, and dried-up peat streams leave big ditches and hollows everywhere. If you can stand a long day's tramp over a rough heather-covered moor you can stand anything.

We came in sight of the heather hut at last, after many halts, made expressly for our friend the keeper to investigate the interior of a spacious flask! We found that the young Skua was just beginning to come out of the shell, and as one of its parents was standing near, and doing her utmost to attract us away, I thought I should have an easy task. And so it proved to be, for after I had got inside and my coat had been thrown over the top of the shelter, and the others had gone away, the hen was very soon back, and I secured a number of photos.

But now my troubles began, for after I had exposed a few plates, a heavy mist came down, blocking out the view in every

direction, and things were made more unpleasant by a driving rain. Very soon I found myself sitting in a pool of cold water, and an icy mist enveloped me. After about two hours of this, it became so utterly miserable, that I crawled out and ran up and down to attempt to get warm, of course not going out of sight of my hut, for I was once lost on the hills in a similar mist, and I did not want another experience like that. The keeper was not due for a couple of hours at least, but I knew that he was probably within three miles of me, so at intervals I blew loud blasts on a police whistle, hoping to attract his attention. Another hour went by, and still he did not arrive, and if it had not been for the Skuas I should have felt absolutely alone in the world. It was a curious experience, for it looked exactly as if I was on a small island. I was on the extreme top of the hill, and the ground sloped all around me, and about twenty

NEST OF THE GREATER BLACK-BACKED GULL, FOUND ON A LONELY MOOR IN ONE OF THE ORKNEY ISLANDS.

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yards away was the white mist shutting out the view in every direction. Again I settled down in the shelter, and the Skua took very little notice of me, but stood by the young bird, which was now out of the shell. If I looked as miserable as I felt, probably she thought I was quite harmless in such a condition! Wet through, with all my limbs cramped, and blue with the cold, I again attempted to run about and attract the keeper's attention with my whistle, and at last—welcome sound—I heard an answer. A moment or two later the form of the keeper loomed through the mist, and better still, he had the flask with him, and, good luck! it was not empty! A few minutes later the cameras were packed, the heather shelter was demolished, and we began our tramp back. When the cosy inn was reached a bath and a good meal put us right, and we were quite prepared for another similar adventure on the morrow.

IX

THE GREAT-CRESTED GREBE

ONE of the chief charms of bird photography is, that it takes you to so many different parts of the country, that is, if you wish to follow up and photograph the rarer breeding species. After rather a long sojourn in the mountains it was a real treat to find myself in a beautiful rural part of England, with lakes, woods, and real wild lanes all around. After settling my luggage in the small village inn—a delightful little place, with old-fashioned stone floors, and meals consisting of the finest ducks and fowls that the counties can produce—I wandered out with my field-glass slung over my shoulder, to see how the birds

The Gannet, going down Wind.

were getting on. Very soon after I left the inn, and before I saw the birds, I heard the harsh *kee-u-war* of the Great-crested Grebe. When I came in sight of the first lake, I saw quite a dozen of these beautiful birds on the water, and getting into a boat, I soon discovered several nests.

One of these was in a very favourable place, and so I made preparations for photography. With the help of two men I built a platform over the water, then surrounded this with hurdles covered with reeds, and the next day went inside with my camera.

I was so well concealed that the hen was very soon back, and I secured quite a number of pictures with my quarter-plate camera and kinematograph. I have often noticed how easy it is to educate a bird to become accustomed to a human being close to its nest. This Grebe was rather a remarkable instance. In the

ordinary way the Grebe is one of our shyest birds, and one exceedingly difficult to approach. After I had secured all the photographs I wanted, I commenced to talk softly to the sitting bird. At first she seemed rather alarmed, for she could not imagine where the strange sounds came from, for it was quite impossible for her to see me. But she stuck gallantly to her eggs. I now began to talk louder, and once she left her nest, but as she did not cover the eggs I knew she was not startled to any degree. The instant she was back I continued this one-sided conversation, and I imagined that she was really getting interested. Presently I very cautiously showed one of my hands above the shelter, and then the other, and when she was quite accustomed to these I slowly placed my head above. She looked wonderingly at me, but showed no signs of being afraid, and as I was only about three yards from her,

THE GREAT-CRESTED GREBE LEFT HER EGGS UNCOVERED AND SWAM AROUND HER NEST.

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I had a very fine view of this beautiful bird. I tried the experiment of throwing a few small objects at her, but still no notice was taken, and then I rolled a newspaper up in a large ball and threw that. This bold Grebe simply raised her crest and showed defiance! At last I climbed out of my place of hiding, and actually stood outside, in full view of the bird, and it was not until I stepped into the boat that she made up her mind to leave, and then only swam away a few yards. On many occasions I have tamed our wildest birds in this manner, but I have never known such a remarkable instance as this Grebe.

Four years ago we had a Great-crested Grebe come to a lake near my home, and only nine miles from London. For several days it remained there, and each night called loudly. Then a mate appeared, and they soon began to build a nest. The person who told me about

the bird arriving said that a strange-looking Duck had been seen on the water, and that he thought of shooting it, to find out what it was. When he said that it was continually diving I thought it might possibly be a Grebe and quickly hurried to the lake. When I found that it really was one of these rare birds, I instantly set to work to guard it from any harm, and I am glad to say that the owner of the estate protected the birds very strictly.

Several times I went to the lake, and from a place where the birds could not see me I watched them building their nest, and I was surprised at the novel way in which they did it. They had chosen a spot where a hanging branch touched the water, and this was used for the support of the nest. Then both birds kept diving, and bringing up large beakfulls of dead leaves and water-weeds from the bottom of the lake. I watched

them for a whole morning doing this, and after several hours' work quite a nice little platform had been built. Eventually four eggs were laid and three young Grebes were successfully reared.

The next spring the two birds again arrived, but unfortunately the owner had left the estate, and before means could be taken to protect them a certain man shot both birds, and they are now to be seen in a glass case! Now if these birds had been left alone, we should have had the pleasure of seeing them year after year, and not only on this particular lake, but also on the neighbouring lakes. It is probable that this lake will never again see them, and all through the selfishness and ignorance of a prowling gunner.

The Little Grebe is a far more difficult bird to photograph than the larger species. This small water-bird is one of the most shy and wary sitters I have ever had. Two years ago I found a nest on the

same lake as I photographed the Great-crested Grebe. Close to it was a Coot's nest, and I was able to photograph both birds from one shelter that I hid in. When I first examined the nests I found that the Coot had laid one of her eggs in the Grebe's home, and the Dabchick had been sitting on this with two of her own eggs.

Each time the Dabchick returned to her nest, she came along underneath the water, and then just popped her head above the surface and had a good look round. The first time that she came, she seemed very suspicious and looked anxiously at the big round eye of the camera pointing through the screen of reeds. Although she was in deep water, she remained in this position, with just her head showing above the water, for exactly twenty minutes, then she sank underneath and did not return for a long time.

While she was away I turned my

attention to the Coot, and while taking animated pictures of her, the Grebe appeared just at the side of the nest and swam about close to the sitting bird. After this she seemed more brave, and I was able to get a few photographs of her at her own nest. It was interesting to note the rapidity with which she covered up her eggs if disturbed. I once timed a Little Grebe in covering her eggs, and from the moment she was disturbed, until the eggs were completely covered and the bird out of sight under the water, only ten seconds elapsed. The Little Grebe is at all times very restless and a most difficult bird to photograph. The Coot, on the other hand, to which I turned my attention, was slow and deliberate in all her movements.

The Coot likes to have her nest high and dry above the surface of the water, but if she was to attempt to get into the nest by struggling up the sides, she

would in the course of a few days almost destroy the shape of the nest. So she does a sensible thing. A small sloping platform about two feet or a yard in length is built from the nest to the water, and each time the bird returns to, or leaves the nest, she uses this small path-way.

I noticed, that as she walked up to the nest, she repeatedly stopped, and with her beak pressed the drops of water from her breast feathers, so that they should be dry when she settled on the eggs.

The young of all the water-birds are exposed to numerous enemies both in and out of the water. Rats and Weasels are always on the look-out for them, and the voracious Jack likes nothing better than a plump young Coot or Moorhen. It is surprising how quickly the young birds take to the water. Young Coots will remain in the nest for a few hours, but the small Grebes are ready to swim and

THE DABCHICK "AT HOME."

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dive almost as soon as they are free from the shells. At this period the mother will guard them most carefully, and I have seen her take her five baby birds under her wings, dive and carry them to a place of safety, by swimming for nearly twenty yards under the water.

The Great-crested Grebe, as far as my own observation goes, only has one brood in a season, but the Little Grebe has two. The second nest is built as soon as the young are able to look after themselves, and sometimes, if the nest should have been built on a small lake or pond, the young of the first nest will assist in rearing the second family. But on larger lakes, where there is more room, the young wander greater distances from the place in which they were reared, and the duty of looking after the young Dabchick again falls almost entirely upon their parents.

X

PROWLERS OF THE NIGHT

WHEN the Robin has sung his last notes, and Blackbirds and Thrushes have followed him to their leafy solitudes, and the mists of night sink slowly down upon hill and valley alike, the world of nature seems dead. There is just one short season between twilight and dark when the valleys seem deserted. But in reality at this time, and with the moon's slanting beams which throw long, deep shadows across meadow and stream, birds and mammals are opening their eyes and going out to seek their food. None know better than the birds themselves what a host of enemies are all around them, as they roost in the dark branches, or lie

huddled together on the ground, ready at a moment's notice to dart away.

When all the land is still, and the silent hush of night, like a silken mantle, hangs over the trees, a keen eager hunter leaves his lair, and cautiously peering to left and right, and again and again stopping with one foot raised, he slinks along under the shadow of the hedge. The Fox, for it is he, treads carefully on the grass as he makes his way up the hill. Many times the hungry animal stops under cover of a grey rock, for the distant bark of a dog, the neighing of a horse, or the bleat of a lamb, causes the Hill-Fox to pause and listen.

But slowly he draws nearer to the sleeping farm. On the little pond two Ducks are floating; he gives them a wide berth, although he does just stop, and with a very low subdued growl, and showing his white teeth, looks at the unsuspecting birds. On a broken gate,

under the shadow of a tree, some fowls are roosting. Reynard hangs back, looks at these for a full two minutes, sniffs the air, then singling out his bird, stalks forward. When two yards away he goes still more silently and cautiously, and when underneath leaps up; he grabs the fowl, there is a loud cry, a flutter, the other birds wake and give out loud calls. the watch-dogs bark, and the next moment the whole farmyard is awake. But the Fox did not wait a moment: he is making off fast, his body held low, and his long brush trailing behind him. And before the moon is much higher in the star-strewn sky, he is back in his lair, where the bird is torn to pieces by his hungry family. Again and again this cunning old Fox visited this farmyard, until one night, as he was about to take another fowl, a loud report rang out, and a charge of shot in his head put a stop to his hunting expeditions.

THE FOX IS ONE OF THE MOST CUNNING BRITISH MAMMALS.

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To even mention the fact of shooting a Fox would bring horror to the mind of the lowland hunter. But on the hills of Wales, where my photograph was taken, it is the only method of keeping them down, for the Hill-Fox is a terrible and cunning thief. In the early spring the farmers do hunt him, but it is very different to the hunts of the lowlands. My friend Paton and I attempted to follow the hounds one April day, and it was tiring and exciting work. It is necessary to follow on foot, for no horse could manage to get over the rough rocks. The dogs picked up the scent very quickly, and we had a very fine view of them as they worked along the stream side. We were high up on the rocks, and then, as the hounds went along the valley, we had to run across the hill to endeavour to pick them up in the next valley. Sometimes men and hounds were lost to one another for hours at a time, and I knew

of one hunt where the hunters followed on foot for fifteen miles. This was tiring exercise, but all seemed to enjoy it, although the pack of hounds in this district had had four blank days, but on the fifth day the hounds soon got on the scent and led the hunters to the Fox's lair. The old Fox however, was not at home, but four cubs were, and these were captured, and with them the farmers found three dead lambs and a number of fowls, showing that these four-footed night hunters had lately had some successful expeditions.

The Fox of the mountains is a far more hardy creature than that found in the lowlands. He has far greater powers of endurance, and often I have listened with interest to the tales told me in the cosy Welsh inns, of the long and exciting runs that have taken place on the hills. One old keeper has told me a certain story time after time, in a manner peculiar to a Welshman. That is, when we have

been out walking together, he would suddenly stop, perhaps for a minute, while with gestures he would add force to the story. Then he would go on again, and again stop, and these halts always seemed to occur when I was in a hurry to get to a certain nest.

One of the least known of our wild hunters of the night is the Badger. There is not a great number of their haunts to be found in these islands.

My photograph was secured on a wild Welsh mountain, where for many generations past a colony of Badgers have lived and flourished. In a very secluded wood, well concealed on the steep slope of a hill surrounded by higher mountains, they have their home, unmolested by enemies.

Dotted about this ancient haunt of one of our most beautiful mammals, there are several mounds of earth. These have been made by the energetic Badgers.

One of these mounds is exceptionally large, and it represents the earth dug out of one of the largest burrows. This "earth," as the Badger's home is called, might almost be likened to a cave. I photographed a friend sitting on top of the largest mound, and it really looked as though he was sitting on a pile made by human hands, and I had to go a good distance away to include everything on my photographic plate.

There is usually one entrance to the Badger's "earth," but lower down the hole branches out into several passages. The chief apartment, or living-room, is very warmly lined. Grass and bracken are used for this purpose, and a very warm and protected place it is for the young.

About the beginning of March, the old bed, which has been used by the parents during the winter months, is cleared out. In this old bed the Badgers have hibernated. Like the Hedgehogs,

The Gannet.

the Badgers are very pronounced hibernators, and during the coldest days of winter they remain rolled up, and lost in that mysterious deep sleep. But with the winter well over, the old home is cleared, and large quantities of new material are carried in. With their claws they will scratch up large bunches of bracken and long dry grass, and then, picking up as much as possible in their mouth, they half carry and half drag the material in. Then this is all carefully arranged inside, so that the young, which are born about the beginning of April, have a dry warm bed.

There comes a time each year when the days of spring seem to softly blend in with those of summer. There is no division between the seasons as when autumn gives place to winter, or the cold of winter to the genial warmth of spring. At that time, when the Welsh slopes have lost the blue of the bluebell,

and the sunbeams come down and softly play upon the flowers of summer, the young Badgers first venture outside their dark home and make their acquaintance with the bright world outside. It must seem a strange, big world to them. We can sometimes see them on bright moonlight nights, running nimbly about the rocks, peering inquisitively into rabbit burrows, and sniffing from right to left like a well-trained dog following up a scent. Then at other times the youngsters will gambol and play in the sprouting bracken like a litter of kittens. They roll over and over, playfully biting at one another's legs, dodge round trees, and fall over the rough ground in their excitement.

It is not often that we see the Badger in the daytime, and I was exceedingly pleased when I secured the photographs which go with this chapter. Farmers do not seem to mind the Badger, which

THE BADGER CLIMBING HIS NATIVE ROCKS.

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is almost harmless as far as they are concerned, when compared with its near neighbour the Fox, but I am afraid that the Badger sometimes suffers for the depredations of the former.

I have already mentioned that the Badger is a very powerful digger, and if chased he will sometimes dig a hole large enough to hide in—that is, if he can elude his pursuers for a short time. In digging, the fore-feet are used to displace the earth, while with the hind feet it is pushed out behind.

The Badger is fond of scratching trees, and I have seen the latter almost stripped of their bark round the base. This animal might almost be likened to a small bear, for in its habits it somewhat resembles the larger species. There is nothing that a prowling Badger likes better than a wasps' nest, or a hive of bees. He will fearlessly attack either, and while the vicious insects are madly

flying around him, he will quite unconcernedly help himself to combs containing grubs or honey, and seems to thoroughly enjoy his meal. The Badger makes a really delightful pet, and if well trained from a cub will become as much attached to its master as a dog.

XI

STAC LII: A BIRDS' PARADISE

WHERE is Stac Lii? I do not suppose that one in ten thousand people could answer this question; and the little island, if it was only more accessible, would be looked upon as one of the world's most wonderful scenes. Stac Lii is an isolated uninhabited rock, about four miles north of the island of St. Kilda, and the latter, as most of us know, is situated off the north-west coast of Scotland.

This towering solitary black rock is about six hundred feet high, and all its sides rise from the sea almost as straight as a wall. There is not a decent landing-place anywhere, and not a single spot

where it would be possible to land a boat. A heavy swell is ever rising and falling around, and landing is really a perilous task, and at the same time exceedingly difficult. At certain times it is impossible for a boat to approach the sides, and since it was anything but a calm day when we attempted to land, we had hard work to prevent our boat being dashed against the rocks. It is an alarming experience to those who have not previously tried to land in similar places. You see a large wave approaching, and you think that it is bound to dash the small boat against the rough rocks, but instead the boat rides up on the wave, and is really very little nearer the cliff. But some of the waves are treacherous, and these need watching, and two of the St. Kildans, one each end of the boat, were keeping it away with poles.

A rope was firmly fixed to one of our

party, and then, while we held one end of this, he waited his opportunity, and at a favourable moment jumped from the moving boat and clung on to the sides of the rock. It was low tide at the time, and landing was even more difficult, for the rocks below high-water mark were covered with a thick mass of slippery seaweed. Now the rope was fastened around my waist and I followed, but had to wait quite ten minutes before it was possible to leave the rocking boat; one more companion left the boat, and then the cameras, kinematograph, and accessories were fastened in their turn to a running noose and hauled up from the boat. However, before I describe the ascent it would be as well to mention how we reached this famous rock. Although I stayed on the island of St. Kilda for a fortnight, there was only one day on which I could get away to Stac Lii, and as an instance of the treacherous weather

around these islands, even in the summer months, a friend of mine who remained on the island for two weeks, was not able to leave the main island once during the whole of that time. As it was, this was my last whole day on the island, and I had to bribe the natives handsomely before they would launch a boat. I offered them a sum that would have tempted most men, but they shook their heads and pointed to the white flecks of foam showing out on the open sea. But I was determined, and doubled the bribe. This had the desired effect; I got a crew of six together, we launched our boat and set out. But no sooner had we got away from the stone jetty than I heard the most excited shouts in Gaelic from my crew; they all rushed to one end of the boat, nearly capsizing it, and the next moment I saw the cause of their excitement. The cork at the bottom of the boat was out, and the sea was rushing in

and threatened to swamp us, but before this happened they managed to find it and place it firmly in the hole.

As soon as we got out of the bay we met the wind, and my crew had to row hard for three solid hours against wind and tide, the four rowers finding it hard work. As an instance of the hardihood of the islanders, one of the rowers happened to be the oldest inhabitant, and although his age was just eighty, he pulled the whole distance without once stopping, although his younger companions twice changed oars. While crossing that four miles dividing the two islands I had many misgivings as to whether we should succeed in landing, but eventually we found ourselves under the shelter of the great rock. Here the rowers stopped, and it was really an awe-inspiring scene to look up at the towering cliffs above us, and at the vast flock of birds which seemed so secure on the summit of their

wild home. To myself, the task of climbing up the sides looked absolutely impossible, but the two St. Kildans who could speak English assured me that I should get to the top, but that it was rather a difficult climb. They had seen some of my cliff climbing on other occasions and had full confidence that I could follow where they would lead.

The cameras were fastened to our backs, a strong rope was fixed to our waists, and then the three of us, securely roped together, attempted the ascent. We left our boots in the boat, for even with well-nailed soles it would be dangerous to use them on the smooth, slippery sides, and a thick stocking gives a wonderfully perfect grip even on wet seaweed-covered rocks.

After a strenuous climb we neared the top of the rock; several times we had to stop, and take the cameras from our backs; then one climber, going upwards, pulled them up after him. In other difficult places

GANNET COMING DOWN WIND. GANNET ABOUT TO SETTLE.

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we had to crawl along narrow ledges, clinging on tightly to crevices with our hands, while beneath us there was a sheer drop of three hundred feet, and we could see our little boat bobbing up and down like a cockle-shell on the waves.

As we passed along the larger ledges or shelves of rock, we actually had to make our way through hosts of struggling sea-birds. Razorbills and Guillemots were all around; they flew up in thousands as we approached, leaving behind their helpless young—bright, fluffy little creatures. The Gannets held their ground and pecked at the legs of the climbers as we passed upwards.

But at last we reached the summit, and the scene there is one of those wonderful Birdland pictures that no pen or camera can do justice to. The large sloping top is one great mass of Gannets—a large bird with a stretch of wing of nearly six feet. As we go amongst them they just

go rolling and falling down the sides in one jumbled, confused heap. The Gannet cannot easily rise from a level surface, and for this reason usually builds its nest on the edge of the precipice; but the ledges on Stac Lii are so fully peopled by other feathered tribes, that they are bound to take possession of the sloping top, and before flying they usually make their way to a ledge, from which they can launch out into space. But as soon as they saw the three strange visitors in their home, they were in such a hurry to leave, that many attempted to take wing direct from their nests, with the result that numbers of others overtook them, and these in their turn tumbled on to those below.

Try to imagine the scene. Five thousand great white birds, with long necks raised, giving out a loud harsh cry of alarm, and then a confused mass of shrieking, frightened creatures falling

over one another. There they went, simply rolling head over tail down the sides, bouncing from rock to boulder, all adding to the confusion below, while thousands of young birds were giving out lesser sounds, and trying to follow their mothers. It was a wild pandemonium—like a panic amongst a crowd—a screaming, terrified panic, with beautiful birds for the actors, and the helpless fluffy youngsters as the spectators. It was a great avalanche of living birds, rolling down to the edge of the cliff, and I stood transfixed with the tremendous novelty of the scene. I thought I had seen great flocks of Gannets on the Bass Rock, and again on that famous home of the Solan Goose—Ailsa Craig, but they paled into insignificance when compared with this scene. All around the air was white with passing wings, like giant snowflakes falling on a living heap of birds ; and far, far below on the great silent ocean thou-

sands more were seen. Up and down, round and round, they went, again and again settling on the rocks with a sounding "flop," and then, seeing the intruders, opened their beaks, and with another wild cry again joined in the tumbling crowd, rolling down on their way to the sea.

But some were bold and refused to leave their nests; and as I approached these with my camera they bravely came towards me, and with angry calls disputed my right of way. One old Gannet was photographed on the very topmost rock of Stac Lii, and while focussing her I was in a rather perilous position with a gaping drop of many hundreds of feet below me. Without the slightest warning, this bird suddenly made a dart in my direction, striking me with her powerful wings, and almost, but not quite, sent me speeding down the steep precipice; but luckily the attacker went over the cliff, instead of

the one attacked, and as I saw the big bird sailing on outspread wings, on her way down to the sea, one or two words followed which expressed my relief.

The descent of Stac Lii was even more difficult than the ascent. Again roping ourselves together in Alpine fashion, we crept and climbed slowly down, while all around us the birds shuffled from our path. At last, with torn clothes and tired limbs, we found ourselves half-way down, and we rested on a narrow ledge crowded with talkative Guillemots. "There's worse to come," said one of the St. Kildans. "Just round the corner there's a very dangerous place." I thought that if the plucky natives said it was dangerous, it certainly must be a very desperate place, and so it proved to be. When I saw the leading climber creep round that corner, practically back downwards, with nothing between him and the sea, I wondered if I should succeed in

getting down. The footholds for our feet were exceedingly small, some only about one inch in width, and there was hardly a niche in which to place our fingers. Taking the camera from my back, and even any projecting things from my pockets, I essayed to follow, and after the most exciting, but shortest, climb of my life, I found myself once again on a firm foothold. Now the last climber had to lower our apparatus and this was not easy, for the peculiar form of the rock at this corner made it necessary to swing the cameras inward before we could reach them; I was very much afraid they might get damaged, and my valuable plates broken, but although they survived this rough usage they bear to this day many large dents and scratches which they received on that occasion.

At length we reached the boat again, and owing to the tide rising and the swell increasing in force, she could not approach

Song Thrush and Young.

close to the cliffs, and we had to embark by fastening a rope from the rock to the boat, and then gripping this with hand and feet we slipped down, with the breakers hissing and roaring beneath. As soon as I reached the boat one of the old St. Kildans left in charge, who had been watching with much interest my attempt at climbing on his native rocks, gripped my hand, and vigorously slapping my back, shouted in broken English, interspersed with Gaelic, "Very much clever, much good clever; brava, brava!"

We remained for nearly half an hour under the lee of the cliff and watched the wonderful scene above. Thousands of white wings were sailing past in a long unending procession; thousands of loud notes were uttered by the birds, for they had not yet settled down from the disturbance caused by the photographer who had invaded their sacred domain.

Certainly, I felt more than pleased with my day's work, for in addition to the delightful and exhilarating climb, and there are few things I enjoy more than a real stiff climb, I had secured a fine series of pictures. It would be impossible to do justice to a scene like the one I have attempted to describe, with a small camera, but with my kinematograph I did secure a rather realistic series of living pictures of the scene, and these have been shown to many thousands of people in my lectures, and in addition to this the whole life of this interesting group of islands—the life of the people as well as the birds, has been shown by the bioscope in nearly every town in Great Britain, all over the Continent, and in America, and the Colonies. So I can fairly claim to have been the means of presenting to millions of people the wonders of one of the most remarkable little islands to be

THE PARENT KITTIWAKES STOOD ON GUARD BY THEIR YOUNG WHEN THE PHOTOGRAPHER APPROACHED THEM.

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found on this globe, and it is interesting to think that such an altogether strange place can be found not a great distance from the shores of Scotland.

We were able to sail back to the main island, and found it a far easier journey than the one we had made earlier in the day. The next morning I left St. Kilda, and the kind natives heaped little presents upon me, such as gloves and socks which they had made themselves. Although they were not exactly the kind of things one could wear in society, yet I valued them very much, for they were given in a real spirit of friendship. Nearly every one of the natives, men, women and children, insisted on shaking hands many times as I walked down to the shore, and I look forward to the time when I shall again have the pleasure of meeting them.

But three of these brave men I shall never see again, for on April 18, 1909, I

received a sad letter from one of the islanders which was brought over by a fishing trawler. It appears that five men went out on a bird-catching expedition, and soon after the boat left the shore it capsized, and three of its inmates were drowned, namely, Donald McDonald, Norman McQueen, and John McQueen, three men who helped me in my work several times during my stay on the island. This tragedy was a terrible blow to the little village, and it was long before the gloom passed away.

When I sailed away from St. Kilda a great dark cloud was hanging over the islands, hiding from view the grassy slopes and giant cliffs, and as I looked back on the lonely sea-girt islands, shrouded in this vast grey mantle, with the sea-birds sailing dreamingly around, anon giving out their wailing *mew*, and later on reached civilisation again, I seemed to have stepped out of the dim

THE WHITE PLUMAGE OF THE GANNETS WAS MADE EVEN WHITER BY THE RAYS OF THE SINKING SUN.

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and distant past into the wonders of a modern world. And, when the dreary days of winter are with us, my thoughts often flash from the sunny south, where the Robin sings his cheerful song, to that dark little village, alone in the Atlantic, the people of which know nothing of the world beyond the waves, and who, in their turn, are unknown by the world.

XII

ON THE NORTHERN SHORES

FOR romantic beauty there are few places to beat the shores of the wild islands on the north and west of Scotland, and for vivid pictures of desolation, the great open moors of the same islands are almost unequalled, for on these wild, wind-swept spots no bushes or trees are seen, but just the coarse grass with all its stems bending away from the sea, and patches of black heather through which the wind whistles its almost unending song, accompanied by the deeper bass anthem of the breaking waves.

These little known haunts are a veritable wonderland for the lover of birds. On some of the islands we see mile after

mile of high, rugged, sea-washed cliffs, every ledge of which is occupied by a sea-bird. On some rocks there are long rows of Guillemots, packed closely together, with their white breasts to the sea, looking like a small regiment of miniature soldiers standing at attention. On other and smaller ledges we see hundreds and even thousands of the beautiful Kittiwakes, for the very smallest shelves of rock suffice for their nests. I like the Kittiwake as much as any of the sea-birds. They are so dainty, and altogether unlike the larger robber Gulls. Then I never tire of watching their graceful flight as they return to their nest with food for the young; and how proud they look as they stand on guard near them! As we climb down to them with the camera, the parents will remain until we are very close, and repeatedly give out their loud shrill cry, *kitt-i-wak, kitt-i-wak.* Even the caves are occupied

by them, the dark green caverns where the Rock Dove finds its home. The Kittiwake chooses the outside ledges, or those near the entrance, but the Rock Dove will penetrate right to the end, where it is dark and damp. What struggles I have had to reach the latter's nests!—but I have, with one exception, not yet been able to find one in a really suitable place for photography. This one was in a small hole, near the entrance of a small cave. The Rock Dove is the most remarkable bird that I have ever known for deserting its nest on the slightest provocation. It was not possible to photograph this nest without the aid of a ladder, so we intended to visit it the next morning, and take a ladder with us. But before leaving I just placed my hand in the hole, and touched one of the two young birds.

The following day I and the keeper went to the nest, and we carried a ladder

YOUNG GANNET COVERED IN SOFT WHITE DOWN.

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over two miles of rough country and then climbed by stages down the cliff side, getting the rather cumbersome ladder with us. The tide was coming in, so we had none too much time to spare for our photographic work. The ladder was then placed in position, I walked up it, looked in the nest, and found both young birds dead! The parents had deserted them, no doubt because they saw us visit the haunt the previous day. I have known the Turtle Dove to desert its nest because the eggs had been touched. We looked around for more nests, but found none, and we had to hurriedly leave the cave, for the tide was rapidly rising, and unless we had had the ladder with us, and used it as a bridge, I doubt if we should have left the cave before the tide receded again.

It is quite impossible to do justice to these wild northern shores with a camera, and it is next to impossible to describe

them with a pen. In every direction in which we look, there is a great panorama of beauty. If we turn our eyes to the sea, we look upon green islands, with wonderfully rugged shores, towering cliffs, and still more marvellous caves, their entrance covered with many bright colours, and the insides filled with the greenest of green water. And then, if we look inland, we see great tracts of land covered with lochs, the breeding haunts of some of our rarest birds.

I well remember one small island that we visited. It was a glorious June day, and our twenty-ton yacht, with all its sails set, was travelling at a dashing pace before the breeze, and rapidly carrying us to a low grass-covered shore. Or rather, when we reached it, we found that the shore itself was principally composed of stones and large slabs of rock, while above this, about five acres of land were covered with long grass.

THOSE CURIOUS BIRDS—BLACK GUILLEMOTS—WERE TO BE SEEN SITTING IN LONG ROWS ON THE EDGES OF THE CLIFFS.

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But what an island that was for birds! With the exception of the Farne Islands, I know nothing quite like it. Terns occupied the lowest shore, and these graceful Sea Swallows rose in hundreds as we landed, and their nests were to be seen on all hands. The nest of the Common and Arctic Terns are not particularly easy to find, for the eggs very much resemble their surroundings, and a very slight nest is made. But when you have discovered one or two, the eye becomes more accustomed to them, and the task is easier. The graceful birds were flying around our heads, some darting down at us, and all were uttering their harsh notes. We found that an egg collector had recently visited the island, and had evidently been disturbed, for the eggs he had taken had all been hurriedly thrown down on the shore, while he decamped. There was a heap of quite sixty of these finely marked

eggs lying there, the majority broken, and amongst this wreckage there was just one egg of the more rare Sandwich Tern.

Noisy Oyster-Catchers were running along the shore, standing for a moment or two on the more prominent rocks, uttering their loud whistle and then running on again with their head bent forward. When they behave like this, it is a sign that the young birds are in hiding close by, and after a diligent search we found two small brown creatures squatting flat amongst the stones. I have often picked these young birds up and then endeavoured to make them run; this they will do for a few feet, and then down they go full length on the ground and remain motionless, with a bright but nervous gleam in the eye. The adult Oyster-Catcher is a handsome bird, with his black and white plumage, and bright red beak and legs, and they give a touch

THE YOUNG BLACK GUILLEMOTS ARE REARED IN A NEST MADE OF STONES AND SMALL PIECES OF ROCK.

of real colour and life to some otherwise rather sombre shores.

Amongst the twelve species of birds that we found breeding on this favoured island, the Black Guillemot attracted me most. I had not come to close quarters with this bird before, and therefore spent a lot of time in endeavouring to obtain photographs. The first time that I saw the Black Guillemot in its native wilds was a few years previously, during a pleasure trip amongst the western islands of Scotland. We had left our steamboat and had landed on an island, and I saw some of the birds on the cliffs, but when I told our guide of my intention of going down, he became wildly excited and held me back. The old sailor evidently thought I should fall, but it was an easy cliff to climb, and I have been down many worse without the aid of ropes.

At first these black and white birds were rather elusive sitters, but by ap-

proaching very slowly, and being very careful not to make any sudden movements, I was in time able to get closer to them. These birds make no nest, but just lay their eggs on the bare ground underneath a slab of rock. On the beach around this island large pieces of rock and stone were lying, one piled upon another, and underneath these, hundreds of the Black Guillemots had their homes. By gently lifting the rocks we saw many clutches of the finely marked eggs, and also a few of the jet black young birds covered with down. As we climbed over the rocks we often heard a shuffling and scurry of wings underneath us, and the next moment a scared Black Guillemot dashed out and flew to a prominent rock, and standing bolt upright, surveyed the intruders.

On the other side of the island the ground rose, and there were some rather fine cliffs, although they were not steep. Hundreds of Gulls were here—Lesser

OYSTER-CATCHER ENDEAVOURING TO CALL ITS YOUNG AWAY FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHER.

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Black-backed Gulls, Herring Gulls, and a few Common Gulls. Eider Ducks were breeding on the grass-covered land, but most of them had already hatched their eggs and taken their young down to the sea.

When we left the island in the evening after a most enjoyable and successful day, the wind had risen and we had a splendid sail up and down the shore before turning in.

On some of the other islands we found large flocks of common Guillemots breeding. They were seen on all the ledges, and on some of the broader shelves of rock they were herded together in countless numbers. When these birds saw us, those on the outside gave out a warning cry, and the others replied, and the low guttural sound seemed to travel like a wave over the whole flock, sounding like a smothered cheer from a human crowd. It was amusing to see some of

the birds arriving. Instead of settling on the edge of the crowd and then shuffling through to their egg or young, they just flopped down on to the backs of their companions, and then pushed and squeezed themselves down into the mass. With such vast flocks the returning birds must certainly have difficulty in discovering their own young. These were fairly easy to photograph, but another bird, the Shag or Green Cormorant, was not so accessible.

The Shag, like its near relative the Cormorant, seems to delight in filth. The greater the stench around the nests, the more happy the birds seem to be. You will often find a number of dead fish near the nests, and as the latter are built of decaying seaweed, one can imagine the atmosphere the birds seem to delight in. I was looking at a group of nests through my field-glasses and noticed that one looked larger than the others, and on a

The Reed Bunting, with Beak full of Food.

closer inspection I found that this nest had actually been built on the dead body of another Shag! A small cloud of flies surrounded the nest, yet the sitting bird seemed perfectly happy. The Shag is a very close sitter and allows a photographer to get fairly near, providing he is slow and deliberate in all his movements. In fact, this is the secret of photographing sea-birds and also some others. I have seen some photographers attempting to photograph Puffins, and the birds were up and away before they were within ten yards of them, and yet I have been able to get within one yard of those same birds. When stalking a bird, you can usually tell by careful watching whether it is going to fly, and if so, just look away from the bird and keep still; when it seems more reassured, go slowly towards it again. I have known that wary bird the Curlew to have been approached in this manner.

When the Shag sees any one approaching its nest, it just opens its spacious beak as wide as possible and utters the most awesome harsh sounds. Any one not actually seeing the bird might easily imagine that the notes proceeded from a man in great danger, or rather they more resemble the cries that one would imagine would be made by a man who was being murdered.

On one of the larger islands we found that magnificent bird—the Greater Black-backed Gull. We had much difficulty in discovering their nests, and after a long fruitless search we retired to the extreme top of a steep hill and had our lunch. From this high point we had a good view of the large moor stretching beneath us. We also watched several of the Gulls down, but the only one that we could distinctly spot as it sat on its nest in the tall heather was quite half a mile away. It seemed almost hopeless

AS THE PHOTOGRAPHER CREPT ALONG THE LEDGE, THE SHAG LEFT HER NEST, SAT ON THE EXTREME EDGE OF THE CLIFF, AND CALLED LOUDLY.

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to attempt to walk to it, so we arranged a series of signals, and after carefully marking the site, I went to the top of the hill and stood against the sky-line, while my friend Paton walked down. Then by signalling with my arms I was able to tell if he was too much to the right or left, but when near the nest, he misunderstood my signals and wandered about one hundred yards to the right. Then I went down, marked the place as near as I could from Paton's position, and after a short search we succeeded in finding it, and felt very pleased with our success.

One hot summer day in the Outer Hebrides, we were resting on the side of a hill watching the birds on a small loch below us. A Greater Black-backed Gull was there searching for food. As it flew over the loch it suddenly dropped in, and then emerged with a good sized eel in its beak. We then saw a most

interesting encounter between the bird and its prey. Before the Gull could swallow it, the eel wound itself round the bird's neck, and evidently nearly throttled it, for the Gull flew angrily about, and turned and twisted in the air; it shook its head violently, and seemed doing its best to get rid of this strange customer, and at last succeeded in freeing itself, and the eel dropped into the water, probably also very pleased at having escaped so easily.

XIII

A CORNER OF HERTFORDSHIRE

THERE is a certain corner of Hertfordshire that simply teems with bird-life. I do not know a better place in our English home counties where it is possible to find so many of our smaller species of birds, or where it is so easy to photograph them. This special little corner of a beautiful and large estate, where game is strictly protected and bred on a large scale, is a paradise for the Warblers, Thrushes, Finches, Buntings, and water-birds, for everything that is not injurious to game is protected also. Each spring I endeavour to put in a few weeks in the small village adjoining the woods, coppices, and lake, and I

always return with a good supply of negatives.

The birds seem to know they are safe, for as I have walked through with my friend the keeper, the sitting birds have not flown from us in alarm, but on the contrary have allowed us to stop and look at them, and often he has pointed out to me a Thrush covering her four or five eggs, or moved aside a sprig of hedge parsley and shown me a small brown bird snugly hidden in her deep nest, and the Sedge Warbler has just looked up with no sign of terror in her soft black eyes. He has gently lifted aside a branch, and shown me a Wild Duck squatting over her nest of down, and above her in the same bush, we saw the bright eyes of a Linnet pleading with us not to disturb her. The branch was replaced and both Duck and the tiny brown Linnet remained on their eggs. And so it was wherever we went, that

corner seemed full of happiness. The spirit of spring was there, and also the spirit of love, for both go hand-in-hand when the flowers are blooming and the air is full of song. In the early morning the coppice was all music and love and sunshine. It was just one big concert-hall—Nature's theatre, with the birds and butterflies for the actors. The Skylark commenced. He began before the grey of night had gone. He went up to meet the sun, for he was so full of joy that he simply had to go up and up to meet the first golden beams. But before he was down every bird had caught the inspiration of his wild song, and a loud confused babel of notes was heard. Not two singing in the same key, and yet a hundred voices and no discord. What a difference between the music of man and that of the birds! With human music the slightest discord jars on the senses, but here in Nature's concert no

time is kept, the singers have no leader, save the spirit and brightness of the sunshine, but all is a glorious harmony, that imparts happiness to all who hear. And they sang until the sun was over the trees and brightening the reed-fringed lake, and then there was a pause in the music until the shadows lengthened and the flowers closed their petals, for these songsters of the springtime, herald in the sun with music, and also sing to his departing beams.

In a small clump of sticks and branches almost hidden by tall grasses, nettles, and wild parsley, a pair of Sedge Warblers had their home. That tiny clump was their big world, a world that held all the happiness that true devotion and love can give. It was there that they built their fragile nest, and for close upon a fortnight the lovers had taken it in turns to sit. For these small brown Warblers that we sometimes only catch a passing

ABOVE THE NEST WAS A BRANCH, AND ON THIS THE HEN REED-BUNTING SETTLED, BEFORE TAKING A BEAKFUL OF FOOD TO HER YOUNG.

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glimpse of as we pass a hedgerow or bush, are the truest lovers to be found. Some of the most touching and beautiful love scenes to be found the wide world over, I have seen, when I have been hidden near a Warblers' nest, and watched them without their knowledge of my presence.

Now the nest contained three very small birds, and I and my camera were only a few feet away, and every movement of the devoted parents was being recorded with my kinematograph. It surprised me with the rapidity with which the parents found food for their young. While one was away the other would brood over the small featherless birds; the hen was particularly anxious about them, and kept moving her position as she covered them. When she left her mate in charge, he would sometimes stand on the side of the nest, and then as soon as she returned he would pop off for more insects.

I was well concealed inside three hurdles stuffed with reeds, and I had waited just upon a week for this chance. Day after day, however, it rained in torrents, and yet I stayed on in the little inn, hoping and waiting for a fine day. At last it came and I secured the pictures, and they well repaid me for my waiting.

There were numbers of small bushes dotted about, almost covered with tall grasses, and under many of these Wild Ducks had their nests, and in several cases a Thrush had built her round home just above. It was in one of these bushes that I found a Thrush's nest in quite an exposed situation, and when the young were hatched I built a shelter close by in which to hide with my camera. The first day that I tried to photograph the bird she was exceedingly shy and suspicious, and I found out that she had seen me go inside. The following day I got a few friends to walk down

THE YOUNG CUCKOO AFTER BEING FED BY ITS FOSTER-MOTHER —A REED WARBLER—OPENED ITS BIG BEAK, AND ASKED FOR MORE.

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to the shelter with me, and they left me inside and went away. The result was that the Thrush, which could not distinguish that one of the party had disappeared, was not at all anxious or alarmed, for she had not the slightest idea that a photographer with two cameras was securing records of her. The animated pictures that I secured upon that occasion are some of the most successful that I have taken. I now have my living pictures in their natural colours, and this set of the Thrush, surrounded with the beautiful tints of Nature in her springtime dress, always takes well in my lecture audiences. In fact, my most popular set of pictures have nearly all come from this specially favoured corner of Hertfordshire.

Close to the Thrush's nest there was a little marshy creek, and here in the evening large numbers of Ducks came in. One evening before sunset, I stationed

myself behind a hurdle and waited. One by one, Mallards and Pochards, Moorhens, Coots, and Tufted Ducks came out of the reeds, and landed to eat up the food, which for several nights had been put there to attract them. The Mallards were more bold than the others and they came in to feed first. Pochards and the elegant Tufted Ducks were rather suspicious of the hurdle that had been placed close to the margin of the water, but after swimming about for a time, they also came in and eagerly devoured the food. I soon had quite one hundred birds swimming around. After securing living records of this very animated scene, I crouched down behind my hiding-place and watched them, and I seemed indeed to be in the very heart of Birdland, and it was a wonderful experience to be so near these shy birds, and all of them quite unconscious that I was there. But this peaceful scene was not to last long, for a Mallard flying down,

AFTER FEEDING THEIR YOUNG, THE TWO LINNETS SAT ON THE EDGE OF THE NEST AND ADMIRED THEM.

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circled over my hurdle, saw me there, and gave out a loud warning *quack-quack*. There was a confused babble of answering notes; a violent flapping of wings and beating of the water, and a moment later, not a bird was to be seen.

When the Linnet's nest contained young I built a small screen of branches in front of it, and waited with my two cameras. The baby Linnets were very small, and the hen did not like leaving them for long, and so she brooded over them. The male brought food to the nest, and then handed this over to his mate and she fed the young. Once when the hen settled down on the nest one of the young birds managed to get its head over the edge. While she was sitting, this tiny head, with its beak wide open, peeped out from underneath her tail. The next time that the male brought food, this strange little head seemed to puzzle him somewhat, and after looking at it for a

moment or two, he slipped down the back of the nest, and popped a beakful of food into that spacious little throat. It was a comical little scene, and the hen did not seem to understand why the food had not been given to her.

The smaller species of birds show very great devotion to their young, and if some of the larger birds of prey were only half as bold, it would be almost impossible to approach their nests. Close to the Linnet's nest, a Hedge-Sparrow had a brood, and when I photographed them, it was rather a warm day with a hot sun shining. But the hen bird evidently knew that the heat of the sun would be injurious to her babies, and so, while her mate went in search of food, she stood over the young, and spread out her wings, and so shaded the whole of the nest. This was a delightful little picture of real devotion, and during the sixty minutes that I remained in hiding with my cameras,

THE REED BUNTING AFTER FEEDING HER YOUNG, LOOKED WONDERINGLY AT THE EYE OF THE CAMERA.

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she also remained and protected her young.

Nature photographers have often been accused of cruelty, by keeping the parents from their young, or causing birds to desert their nests. When photographing a bird, or rather attempting to, and she does not come back soon, you may be sure that there is something at fault in the way you have concealed yourself. I stayed one month in this part of Hertfordshire, and I was photographing nearly every day, and not a single bird, amongst the dozens I photographed, deserted or was caused the slightest inconvenience.

Down at the end of the lake there was a large patch of reeds. The young new reeds had not yet grown up, but last year's yellow stems were broken down and matted together. Far away from the bushes we found a Hedge-Sparrow's nest built low down in the reeds, a very unusual place, and close to this we dis-

covered several Reed Bunting's nests. One of these contained four almost fully fledged young. We built a small shelter near this, but as soon as we began photography the two parents called their young away. These could not at first understand, but when the mother stood in the reeds a short distance from the nest, held up a beakful of tasty insects, and called to her young, they scrambled out and went to her. When once a young bird has left its nest in this way it seems almost hopeless to obtain photographs, for if you place them back, the parents, instead of coming to the nest, will simply call the young to them.

I placed a small branch over the nest, and both the cock and hen Buntings settled on this before diving down into the reeds where their young were concealed. I very much wanted to obtain photographs of the hen actually feeding her young, but the latter were almost

hidden in the reeds. At last I carefully spotted where the young were, and then brought two into my shelter, and very carefully fastened the other two in the nest. For some minutes the parents tried hard to call them away, but finding that they would not, and in fact could not leave, the hen soon began feeding them in the nest, and I secured the photographs that I wanted.

At the end of July I paid another visit to this haunt, and found that it had put on the more sober garb of summer. The gay colours of spring had gone, the song had ceased, and most of the birds had finished that most important item of their life—the rearing of a family. But there was just one nest left. Right in the corner of the lake, amongst the reeds which had now grown up, a Reed Warbler had a young bird in her nest. This was a Cuckoo, and when I went there, the bird was even larger than the

nest in which it was trying to sit. I often wonder what these small Warblers think when they find their youngster growing to such a size. I had been hoping to be able to get photographs of this young Cuckoo, for the nest was carefully protected when we found it contained a Cuckoo's egg. I, however, had to go up to the Orkney Islands to do some photography there, and on my return I quite expected to be too late for the Cuckoo. But my friend the keeper sent me a wire, and a few minutes later my cameras were packed, and I rushed off to this Hertfordshire village as fast as the trains would take me. I was met at the station and driven the four miles to my little inn, and lost no time in going to look at the Cuckoo.

When we approached the nest, the two Reed Warblers became very angry, and on parting the reeds aside, I saw the plump young bird on the nest, for it was

THE YOUNG CUCKOO IS ALWAYS ASKING FOR FOOD, AND NEVER SEEMS TO BE REALLY SATISFIED.

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quite impossible for it to get inside. It was now evening and far too late to attempt photography. The next morning I was up early, but the weather looked very threatening. I knew that if I did not photograph the Cuckoo then, it would have left its nest by night. Time was short, and notwithstanding the weather I went out in the boat and took my camera and kinematograph, and soon had them in position. Before I had exposed a plate the rain began; the parent birds seemed quite tame, and although I was not entirely concealed, simply having my Burberry coat thrown over the cameras and my head, they began to feed the youngster. I attempted to take some living pictures of this, and although I had many misgivings as to whether they would be successful, they did eventually turn out very well. The Cuckoo began to get restless, no doubt rather scared at the strange apparition

near his home. The nest was beginning to give way, and at last the youngster fell out into the water below. It flapped helplessly about, and as it looked like drowning I took off my things and jumped in to the rescue. By the time I reached it, the little creature was half drowned, but I tried to dry its feathers, or get the loose water off them; then I fastened the nest securely in position, and placed the bird on it.

Owing to this little accident, I was privileged to see one of the most touching incidents I have ever looked upon in the world of the birds. The Cuckoo sat on the nest silent and still. His eyes were closed and his beak was pointing up, and altogether he looked a most unhappy little object. Presently his foster-mother came to him, and in her beak she had a small insect. Her surprise seemed very great when she found that her baby did not greet her with a

large wide-open beak as usual. At first she did not take much notice, but very soon she became quite concerned. Then she disappeared for a few minutes, and when she returned again she brought one of the largest insects I had seen her bring. The devoted foster-mother offered this to her big overgrown baby, and when the young Cuckoo still took no notice she became genuinely alarmed. She hopped round him, opened her wings and beat them rapidly in her excitement; several times she tried to force his beak open with her own, but still he sat there quite immovable. Then the Reed Warbler placed the insect on a portion of the nest just in front of the Cuckoo's breast, and again she hopped round and round the bird and uttered a plaintive little note. She picked up the insect again, held it in front of his beak, and did all she possibly could to rouse him. All this time I had been turning the

handle of my kinematograph, but the rain was coming down heavily, and it was almost too dark for photography, and this film turned out to be very much under-exposed. As my cameras and apparatus were getting so wet I had to go. When I returned to the nest the next morning the young Cuckoo had gone, but by the loud notes of the Reed Warblers not very far away, I judged that the bird had recovered, and succeeded in reaching a place of safety.

XIV

A TRAGEDY OF THE WOODS

THE leaves are floating down from the tops of the taller trees, for the soft breeze reaches the higher branches while the bushes are standing silent and still. Not a branch is moving on them, and each one seems to be clothed in a different tint of autumn's garb. The tall bracken makes the brightest show, for on its fern-like leaves all the colours of the year seem to be grouped together into one glorious whole. Over the distant lake a still blue mist is hanging, and the silver-like surface of the water is only broken when a Water-hen or Coot swims across.

A Squirrel in the tree above is jumping

from branch to branch, and a noisy Jay pulls an acorn from the tree, plays with it for a time, and throws it down. The Squirrel also finds an acorn, and holding it in his front paws, turns it round and round and bites the tough covering off. Another Squirrel joins him, and both indulge in a game amongst the leaves.

Suddenly they stop in their play; the Jay flies onward, and startled rabbits stand up, and with ears erect wonder what is the matter; discretion gets the better part of wonder, and they run to their burrows, for a loud "snorting" is heard, and into the arena of green there trots two angry Stags, followed by several Does.

The larger of the two animals lifts his nose and sniffs, and as he does so the others look expectantly at their leader. He snorts again, and gives out his war-cry. He is an old warrior, and in his day has fought many an unrecorded

COOT WALKING UP THE SLOPING PATHWAY LEADING TO HER NEST.

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battle. Lowering his head, he runs out into the centre of the opening on the margin of the wood, and the other Stag follows. The latter is not so large as the old fighter, but nevertheless a magnificent animal and well built. He has challenged the monarch of the woods, as many a youngster had done before, and standing firmly with front legs fixed in the ground, and with head lowered, he waits for the attack. The Hinds anxiously look on at the two fierce champions facing one another, and their big soft eyes are full of wonder. The eager young fighter tires of doing nothing, and attempts to alter his position, and the next instant with a mighty crash the monarch charges him.

For a moment he is stunned by the unexpected blow, and staggers back, but disentangling his horns he springs aside, and then with great power dashes in to meet his follower. Their horns are locked

again, and with heads lowered they push and slowly work round; one is forced upon his knees, and the other still pushes and shakes his head. Their horns rattle loudly, and the noise awakes the silence, and startled birds in passing give out their cries. The Stag that is on the ground quickly slips his horns away, and jumping up, gives a strong side blow, as the other, losing his balance, falls past him. Both spring into position again; the Does become excited, and crowd together, and raise their pretty heads, and repeatedly lift their front feet, as though anxious for their champion.

Again and again the animals charge, and the clashing of their horns echoes through the still leaves. The inquisitive Squirrels, like the small boy in the street who is always in evidence when a fight is in progress, leap on to a nearer branch, and one stops nibbling his acorn and looks on in wonder.

The Stags are now again locked in a tight embrace, and they rear up on their hind legs, and when one manages to free his horns, they use their front feet and actually punch with these like human boxers. The monarch then waits his opportunity, and while the other is sparring at him, he suddenly jumps back, lowers his head and rushes in under the raised hoofs. His antagonist is knocked over, and a gaping wound, from which the blood trickles, is seen. But the pain only goads him on, and springing up, and before the other can return to the attack, he dashes in and meets him on his side before he can turn round. With a deadly thud both roll over, and struggle and kick while down.

The younger Stag is making a bold fight, and his wound, instead of subduing him, seems to have had the effect of rousing his anger. Time after time he charges, but is met with solid resistance,

and then after another series of wild blows, each Stag voluntarily runs back a few paces and they rest. One of the Does walks up to the challenger, and seems to be sympathising with him, for his shoulder is covered with blood and dirt. All the other Hinds crowd around their old favourite, and some lick his body.

Some more Deer come up the grassy slope and join their companions, and a few minutes later the fighters prepare again. The still excited Hinds are standing in a group with their heads raised high, and still that wondering and anxious expression in those big beautiful eyes.

They jump with a startled gesture with the first crash of those horns, and again with a louder clash than ever the heads of the fighters meet. The larger Stag is forced back, and the attacker, finding that he has the advantage, follows the charge up with a swinging side blow with his horns. The other seems almost

COOT'S NEST.

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stunned, and the blood slowly runs from a long gash in his side. Leaping clear, the youngster runs rapidly round, and before the other has recovered from the shock, he is charged powerfully on the other side and sent flying on to his back. With a cry of triumph he rushes in again, and before the fallen monarch can recover he receives a smashing blow on his neck. But the victor of a score of similar battles is not yet vanquished. He struggles to his feet and runs back to his Does, but strange to say, receives little sympathy, for their eyes are on the gallant newcomer, who is standing there with his head raised high. The latter with an angry snort prepares to charge and the Hinds fall back. The wounded Stag lowers his head and pretends he is going to receive him, but just at the critical moment springs aside, and the other in falling past receives a fearful blow in the ribs. This is rapidly followed by a charge, and

again both fighters are down. Their anger is now roused with a vengeance. Throwing aside all ideas of a waiting battle, both are on their feet again, and charge follows charge, and their large horns clash together with rattling blows.

Round and round they circle and once more they are on their hind legs. At last the challenger lowers his head, which is covered with blood and hair, and with one great charge goes in at the other. Instead of a crash, there is a dull thud, and the sharp lower portions of his horns are stuck into the enemy's body. With one supreme effort, he turns his head, and the old monarch of the herd is half lifted off his feet, and thrown on his side. The blood gushes from the wounds ; his tongue is hanging out as he raises his head. He struggles to his knees, but his head falls forward. Again he makes a great effort to stand, and then collapses in a heap. The victor with lowered head looks at the

fallen hero, sniffs his twitching body and moves slowly away. But as the Does join him, his blood-stained head is raised high, and all except one Hind follow him as he walks down to the lake. She is looking at the dead Stag; she tenderly licks his body, then turns and slowly follows the herd.

And the autumn leaves float gently down, finding a resting-place on the blood-stained ground; and the Squirrel in the oak above goes on nibbling his acorn. The silent woods become still more silent, and the evening mist settles down on meadow and lake alike.

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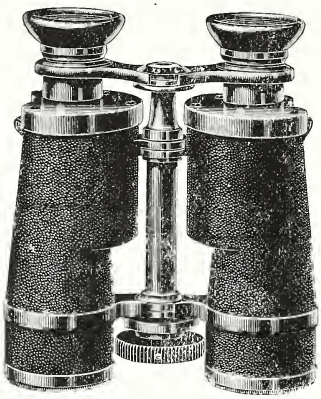

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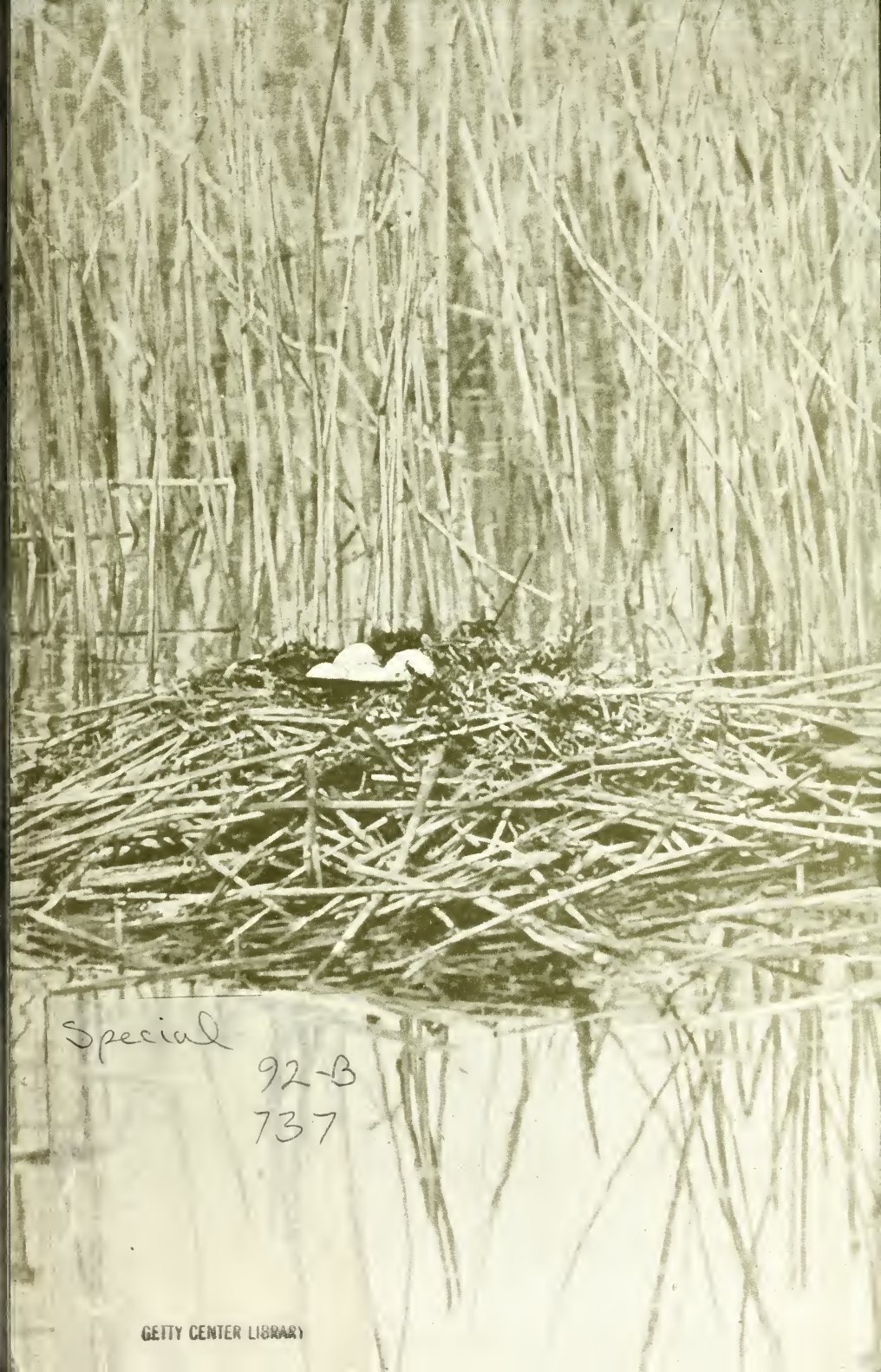

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